

Maestro Saskia Rao de Haas

the Indian Cello





Biography

Maestro Saskia Rao-de Haas, a world-renowned cellist, composer, cultural entrepreneur, and educationalist from the Netherlands, has made a significant impact in the world of music. Although initially trained as a Western cellist, her life took a different direction when she discovered Indian music in 1993. Since then, she is recognized as a master performer of Indian classical music and is credited with inventing a unique instrument called the Indian cello.

Her Guru, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, the revered flute maestro stated that her music is a gift from God that everyone should experience. Critics and audiences alike have praised her exceptional artistry and technical skills, recognizing her performances for their depth and virtuosity. Her new instrument, the Indian cello, in her hands are described as 'unmatched by any other string instrument', 'Range of an entire orchestra', 'closest instrument to the human voice', 'Movingly meditative' and 'bringing Indian music into a brave new era' by leading newspapers across the world.

Saskia has graced the most prestigious festivals for Indian classical music worldwide, including the Doverlane Conference in Kolkata, 'Legends of India' in New Delhi, 'Saptak' festival in Ahmedabad, 'Vasanta Habbha' in Bangalore, the 'Maihar' festival, and 'Haridas sangeet samelan' in Lucknow. Notably, she is the first non-Indian artist to be invited to perform at the prestigious Doverlane Music Conference in Kolkata in 2003.

Saskia has extensively toured North America, Australia, Europe and Asia, captivating audiences at renowned concert halls and festivals such as the Joh F Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, the Cello Biennale in Amsterdam, the New Directions Cello festival in the US, Europalia in Brussels, Musee Guimet in Paris, at the Esplande in Singapore, and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London to name a few.

As a collaborator, she works extensively with her partner on stage and in life the world renowned sitar maestro Pt Shubhendra Rao. Both their Indian jugalbandi (duet) as well as many compositions for themselves and various ensembles have captivated the world since the early 2000's. Since 2014, they are often joined on the piano by their pianist son, the prodigiously talented Ishaan Leonard Rao.

She also collaborated with and accompanied some of India's most prolific musicians including her Guru Pt Hariprasad Chaurasia, Pt Jasraj, Pt Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Vishal Bhardwaj, Ustad Rashid Khan, among others.



Performer





Biography

In 1999, Saskia Rao-de Haas made the life-altering decision to move to Delhi and fully embrace the life of an Indian musician. Her debut concert took place in 2000 at the India International Centre in New Delhi, marking the beginning of a remarkable journey as a performer of Indian music.

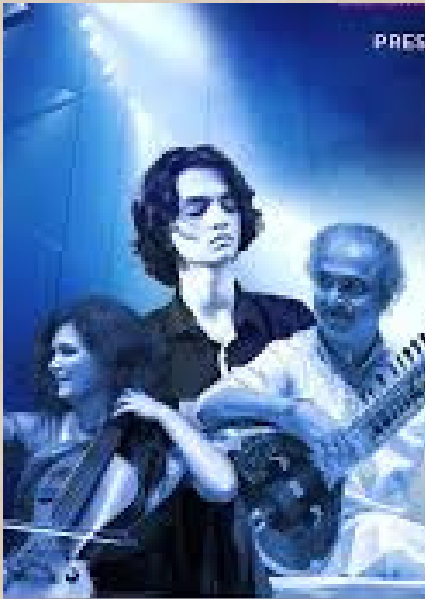
Throughout her career, Saskia has received numerous accolades for her contributions to music and music education. In 2011, she was honored with the prestigious 'Pandit Jasraj Award for Cross-Cultural Understanding' by the legendary Pandit Jasraj himself at a magnificent ceremony in Hyderabad. In 2014, she received the 'Delhi Ratna' award for her significant impact on Indian classical music. In 2024 she received the India Today-Mahindra group 'Drivers of Change' award and the prestigious 'Women's Achiever' award from Aalekh Foundation.

Saskia's instrument, the Indian cello, is the result of years long experimenting between 1993 and 2003 together with the luthier Eduard van Tongeren. In 2004 this collaboration led to the new instrument that she named 'the Indian Cello'. In 2014, Saskia also developed another unique instrument called the electro-acoustic Indian Cello, which she named 'Veena d'Amore.' This smaller, electro-acoustic cello was custom-built for her by French builder Alexandre Letellier, adding a new dimension to her musical expression.

Saskia is also a co-founder of the Shubhendra and Saskia Rao Foundation, which aims to promote the joy and benefits of (Indian classical) music in education. She has created the first complete music curriculum for Indian music with her own specifically designed methodology, pedagogy and teacher training, based on six storybooks. Over 100,000 children, 200 music teachers, and many schools, institutes and NGO's have already benefited from the 'Sangeet4All' music framework. The books that Saskia authored gives children a solid foundation in music and instills a life-long love for music. The patented Swartarang, a musical instrument, is hailed as another groundbreaking development in Indian music education that enables young children to understand complexities of Ragas and musical composition. Saskia firmly believes in the transformative power of music, particularly in the education of children and youth. The foundation received the support from and collaborated with the Ministry of Culture of India, ICCR, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Tata Steel Foundation, Massachusetts Arts Council, and many more partners across the world.



Performer



THE RAO TRIO
 WESTERN CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTS
 HUBHENDRA RAO (SITAR)
 SASKIA RAO (INDIAN CELLO)
 LEONARD RAO (PIANO)
 MANAGED BY GANESH ADHIVANAN





Author

Saskia Rao de Haas is not only a performing artist, but is a respected scholar, musicologist and author as well. She authored six books on Indian music for children and has written multiple articles on music in leading magazines in India, the US and the Netherlands. She has written for magazines such as Sruti Magazine, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, India Festival Netherlands and many other (online) publications. She has written the Indian Music History book for the conservatory of Rotterdam. She has written music educator handbooks, children books and the complete music curriculum of Sangeet4All. Her books have been praised by educationalists, artists and critics alike.

Articles:

2000 Notatie in Indiase muziek, Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Musicologie

2002 The Indian Cello, Sruti Magazine

1996- 2022 About music, music education and India, Various newspapers in the Netherlands and India

2000-2022 About Indian music and the Indian Cello, India Festival Magazines across the world

2012- 2022 About the meaning of music, Indian music, Indian cello, Online magazines

2015 – 2024 Articles for music teachers: Musical instruments for young children, Music education and special needs, Teaching music in the Indian classroom, Teaching Indian music, The Soundwalk

Books:

1996 Indian Music History, Rotterdam Conservatory

2015 Dhwani, Sangeet4All

2016 Vadya, Sangeet4All

2017 Raga&Tala, Sangeet4All

2018 Desi, Sangeet4All

2019 Duniya, Sangeet4All

2022 Shastra, Sangeet4All

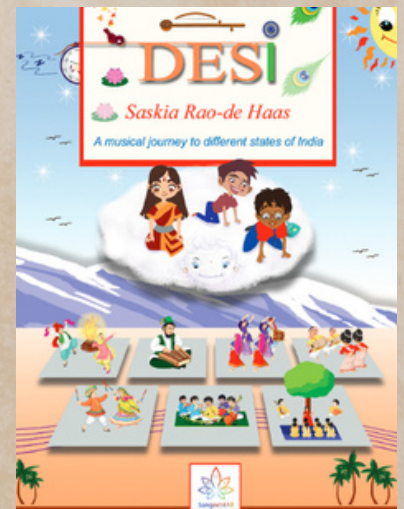
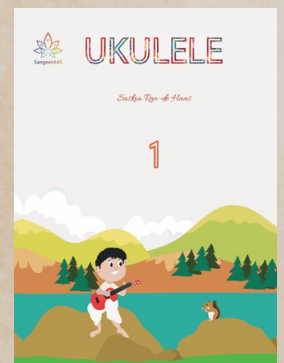
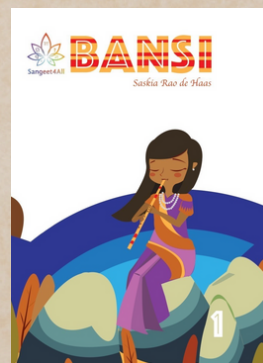
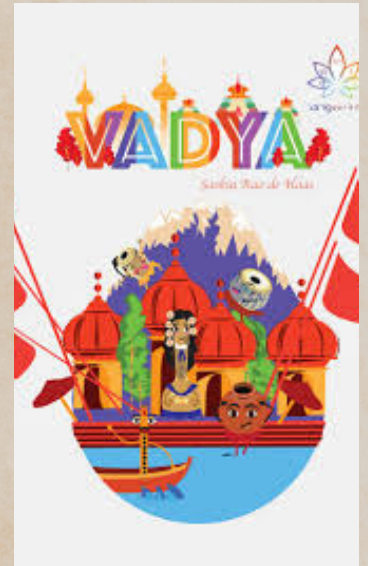
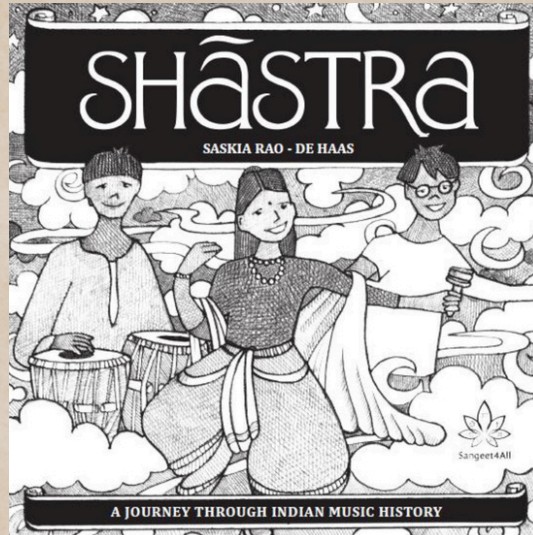
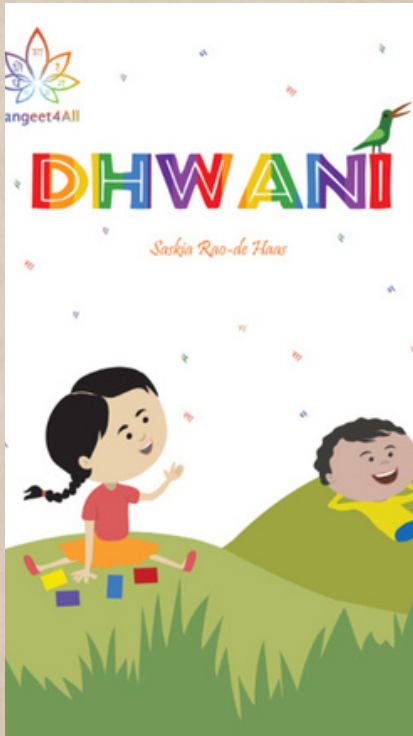
2015-2024 Teacher Handbooks on the Sangeet4All music curriculum

Author statement:

The reason I started writing is to share my knowledge on how to engage the audience and especially children and youth with Classical music. Too often the perception is that classical music is 'too difficult', whereas usually it means that the way of presenting and teaching the music needs more attractive and engaging resources to communicate to audiences. If we open our ears, we can internalise the universal truths embedded in the soft whisper of classical music.



Author





Educator

Saskia has taught many students across the world. Professional musicians, students of music and children are among her disciples of Indian Cello in the Guru Shishya Parampara, the ancient relationship between teacher and student. She has given lectures, workshops, and classes at leading universities in the Netherlands, the United States, India and Australia. She loves to transmit the knowledge of Indian music to new audiences as well and show students how Indian music is relevant in their own specializations in practice routines, improvisation, mindfulness and composition. Hundreds of music students across the world have benefitted from these classes.

Her music curriculum Sangeet4All has impacted over a 100.000 children in India and music teachers across the world. Sangeet4All is India's first music curriculum for young learners created by Pandit Shubhendra Rao and Vidushi Saskia Rao, to teach Indian classical music through a systematic learning module. The aim is to teach the age-old Indian music concepts through internationally tested music pedagogy and methodology. Its key components are "playful immersion and acoustic authentic experiences"- two terms coined by Saskia Rao, describing the traditional way in which children from musical families are taught music.

She has been invited as a speaker and specialist on music education by UNESCO, the Delhi Government, the Jaipur Literature Festival, FICCI, El Sistema US, Massachusetts Arts Council, and as a guest lecturer in universities in Australia, the US, Netherlands and the UK.

[Article in the Ensemble Magazine for Music Education](#)

[Articles on music and music education](#)

Educator



'In 2014 begon ik met mijn muziekproject voor kinderen. Het is niet alleen om kinderen te laten spelen, maar samen met hen te creëren. India is wel een muzikaal land, maar de muziek is vaak niet duidelijk. Het helpt de ontwerper van je hersenen om in een betere gezondheid, meer kracht en creativiteit te komen. Inmiddels is dit project uitgeroepen tot een succes. We geven les aan kinderen. Wie geeft? Muziek geeft volgend een positieve impuls. Samenwerking. Zij brengen landen bij elkaar. Toen de Duitse kanselier Angela Merkel ons gevraagd om te treden. Tijdens mijn muziektour legde ik de betekenis van Beethoven voor de hand nam. Muziek kent geen grenzen. In september presenteerde Saskia tijdens een tournee in New York over de Indiase muziek. Met de Nederlandse ambassadeur met Shubendra a

land is van omgerekende 50.000 kinderen. Saskia Rao de Haas (51). Ze reizen terug naar India in een Nederlands consertje voor studenten en haar was de bedoeling. Maar ontwierp haar eigen Indiase cello, een heel nieuw muziekinstrument. Een Indiase krant schreef na mijn eerste optreden: "The Cello says Hello!" Saskia en Shubendra treden samen op, maar ook solo. En tegenwoordig ook met hun zoon aan de piano. Saskia meerschappelijk muziekproject water. Voor Nederland ligt dit in de Afsluitdijk en waterwet; in India is de rivier de Gange langrijkste symbool van water. Het is een kunstwerken over in Nederland en India. Daar





Composer

Composing is a natural extension of my musical journey and a way to connect the different parts of my artistry. Interestingly, I have only quite recently started writing down my scores. I felt the need to write down my own compositions because it opens the door to musicians that are used to playing written music. Now that I am working more with orchestras and larger ensembles, writing down scores has become essential. It also gives an easy access to musicians that want to understand Indian music better but not necessarily become Indian musicians. The methodology I developed is helpful for them. Notations are an effective medium to connect artists from various musical backgrounds. This is an essential theme in my work. I want people to experience how connected we all are artistically and that we can learn so much from each other through our music. I love co-creating music and all compositions with the Sitar are co-creations with my amazing husband, and partner on and off stage Pandit Shubhendra Rao.

I am very excited and honoured that all my music will be published through Donemus, Netherlands.

-Saskia Rao de Haas

Special Moments



green signal

PM Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel with musicians Pandit Shubhendra Rao and Vidushi Saskia Rao-de Haan after their fusion music concert in New Delhi on Monday

Language a barrier no more, Sanskrit German both to gain





Composer

Some Major works:

August 2024

- **Song of Water, Concerto for Sitar, Indian Cello and Orchestra. World Premiere Theatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro**

February 2024

- **Čiurlionis in India, Duet for Violin and Indian Cello, world premiere in celebration of the National day of Lithuania**

September 2023

- **Musical score for the film 'Flickering Lights'**

April 2023

- **Ahir Bhairav, for the 'East West Orchestra' world premiere in celebration of the national day of Israel**

March 2023

- **Alap Scape I and II, for the Embassy of Luxembourg and the Amarnath Sehgal Museum**

January 2023

- **Villa Lobos in India - music by this great composer reimagined and integrated in Indian classical music. For Sitar, Indian Cello, Piano and tabla**

November 2022

- **Song of Water- see the music, hear the painting. With support of the Netherlands Embassy for Sitar, Indian Cello and Tabla Tarang**

2020

- **White Sound: sound scapes created with overtones on the cello containing all the notes, swaras, present in the Raga**



Listen





Composer

2019

- **Apa Deepo Bhava** - Dance production by Dr Sonal Mansingh for Sitar, Cello and orchestra
- **2018**
- **'Sangeet Aur Katha'**- For Solo Cello and Story telling. Two compositions based on the books Raga& Tala and Duniya

2016

- **'When Gods Meet'** - Dance production by Dr Sonal Mansingh for Sitar, Cello and orchestra

2015

- **'Ekta'**- Music for Angela Merkels visit to India. World Premier at Hyderabad House New Delhi. Music for Sitar, Indian cello, Shehnai and tabla

2010

- **Mukhani**- an Indian string quartet. For string quartet. World premier at the India Festival at the Concert gebouw, Amsterdam

2007

- **Yatra**, an Indian ballet for Sitar and Cello, world premier at the Edinburgh Festival

2006 onwards

- **Indian Cello Study pieces (sargams)**

2000 onwards

- **Duets for Sitar & Indian Cello (East Marries West)** , duets for two celli, duets for cello and piano, Music for Sitar, Cello and Piano (Rao Trio) and music for varied ensembles



Listen

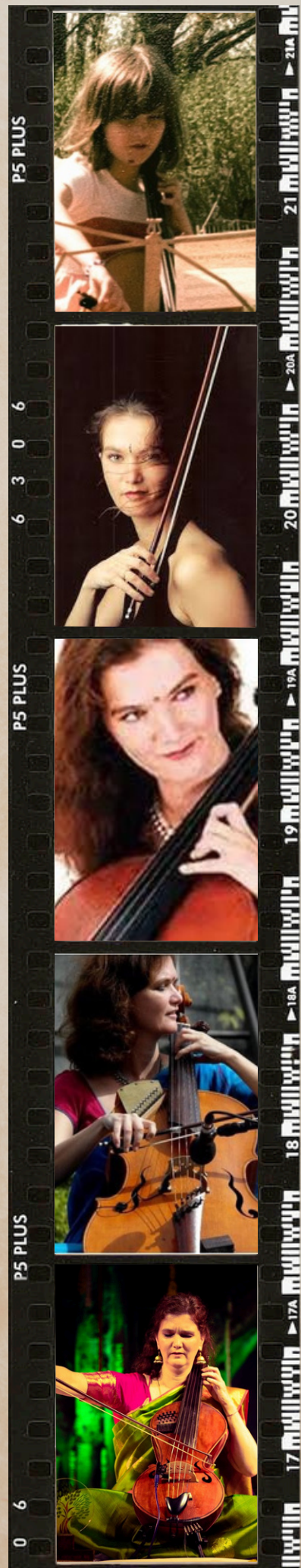




The Indian Cello

Saskia Rao de Haas is the creator of 3 new instruments: the Veena d'amore, the Indian Cello, and the Compact Indian Cello.

- **BEGINNINGS:** I started the cello when I was 8 years old under the Hungarian cello virtuoso Tibor Machula. It was love at first sight and it was clear I would be a cellist, but Indian music? As I was born and raised in the Dutch countryside, I had no exposure to Indian music as a child.
- **CELLO BECOMES INDIAN:** The first lesson of Indian music, I was seated on a chair. As it was clear that this is not the right equation to learn music I made sure I could sit on the floor with my regular cello.
- **COLLABORATION WITH EDUARD VAN TONGEREN:** The Dutch luthier Eduard van Tongeren is a respected and well known in the Netherlands. I got my first cello as a child from his workshop and he has build various new instruments, such as a bariton and viola d'amore. The first instrument he build for me was based on the Viola d'amore and we called it the Veena d'amore
- **THE INDIAN CELLO:** The cello that Eduard build for me that I named 'the Indian Cello' is from 2004. It is a beautiful instrument with 5 playing strings and 10 resonating strings.
- **THE SMALL INDIAN CELLO:** Because traveling with a big cello and miking it is always difficult, I approached Pondicherry based luthier Alexandre Letellier to build a small instrument that can travel as hand luggage. I am equally happy with the sound quality.





In the Press

Find some links to interviews with Saskia and reviews of her performances

[Tulip Festival](#)

[Song Of Water World Premiere](#)

[Song Of Water World Premiere](#)

[Music Outreach in Orissa](#)

[Ode To Joy EU Day](#)

[Driver of Change Award](#)

[Ravi Shankar Centenary Celebration in Spain](#)

[Aalekh Foundation Award](#)

[Music Education- the Hindu](#)

[LondonJazz News](#)

[Unlock the Music Concert Series](#)

[Mozart in India Concert Review](#)

[Shastra Book](#)

[Interview in Score Magazine](#)

[Interview in Indica](#)

[Interview in the Hindu](#)

