

*Manoj Joseph Mavelly is a musical prodigy all young students aspiring to be world famous performers can identify with. A Delhi based young man of 27, Manoj did his schooling from St. Columbus and, like many teenagers, started playing the guitar as a hobby when he was about 15. However, on not being able to find a good instructor for the instrument he dropped it and shifted to playing the drums on joining Hindu College as an undergraduate. By this time, the music bug had well and truly bitten him! Practicing and learning all on his own with the aid of instructional videos of some of the top drummers of the world was his only means of obtaining professional guidance, as he became deeply involved in his field. Seeing his dedication and commitment, his parents left him to make his own decisions and carve out a career path for himself.*

*After 8 years of hard work and a gut-gritting schedule consisting of 8-10 hours of concentrated practice, day in and day out, he was accepted by Berklee College of Music for their 4year Professional diploma in music and with a great scholarship to boot!*

*In a telephonic interview with Ila Aggarwal, Manoj talks about his view of and experiences at Berklee and how he changed focus from an aimless BCom Hons at Hindu to studying Music at this prestigious College which has opened vast vistas of opportunities in a field he has come to love and accept as an intrinsic and inseparable part of his life.*

RTG: Generally, why did you wish to study music abroad and why Berklee in particular?

MANOJ: A hunger for better and deeper knowledge led me to pursue music as a subject and since in India there is an absolute dearth of institutions offering formal education in western contemporary music, the only way out was to apply abroad. I kept experimenting and bought lots of books on Music to study which greatly contributed to my musical development but after a point of time, you've got to start playing with and learning from people who have spent their entire lives exploring the subject. I needed a formal education to become a complete musician. Only playing drums would not get me there. I did apply to a few other colleges because Berklee seemed like a very expensive option. Anyway, I sent my demo CD to Berklee as well and was ecstatic when they offered me admission together with a scholarship. This was a definite sign for me... to be able to study at the world's premier institution of music was an opportunity I just had to hold on to.

RTG: Do you play any other instrument besides the drums and a little bit of guitar?

MANOJ: I play the Tabla as well. In fact, when I'm at school in Boston, I teach Tabla to interested students which helps contribute towards meeting my living expenses. Moreover, it feels great to be able to play and teach an instrument as popular as the Tabla, which is also universally appreciated by musicians and the demand for which by far exceeds its supply, especially in the West.

RTG: Academically speaking, what has your experience been like at Berklee?

MANOJ: It's just...been so wonderful that I cannot put it in words. It is a dream come true; the best experience of my life, which has proved to be everything I thought it would be, and much more. There are about 4000 students playing music all day, which makes it a 24 hours learning experience, you learn, grow and evolve each day. Most of the faculty members are Grammy award winners. Some of the famous Berklee alumni are Quincy Jones (Producer, arranger, composer, songwriter), Chick Corea, Pat Metheny, Abe Laboriel (the last three being famous Jazz music artistes).

RTG: Please describe the campus life at Berklee.

MANOJ: Campus life at Berklee is a totally different experience from the regular universities in the U.S. College in India was for me a total waste of time as I was not interested in commerce but like all students graduating from high school I had to go to college for something and since the trend at the time was commerce, I opted for it. At Berklee I was doing what I loved doing most – studying music. Moreover, Berklee does not have a clearly defined, distinct campus. It's spread out in different buildings across different streets all over the city; however, they are all in close proximity of each other.

You will see Berklee students spewed out all over the city, practicing, playing music in Jazz clubs and concert halls or performing somewhere within or outside the city. You only meet people to share your thoughts on or talk about music. No real campus life and no other socializing. People eat, drink and sleep music. For a student passionate about music, there is no other life and only serious and focused students apply and get through to Berklee. In fact, even after being accepted there, Berklee's stringent rules stipulate that each student be auditioned separately through a live performance which is rated by a panel of judges. Based on your individual ratings alone will you be permitted to choose your subjects of study. Every student is not eligible for all the courses.

RTG: how does a Berklee education enhance your career prospects?

MANOJ: Before I joined Berklee I only played the drums (rhythm based); now I can also play the piano (melody based). Besides this, I am now learning music composition, arranging, harmony, ear training, etc. I have now developed an interest in and knowledge of many different facets of music. As a result, on graduating, I could teach music, be an arranger, a composer, a songwriter or form a band either in India or abroad. I could even get into the music management business.

In short, education at Berklee gives you a total understanding of the subject and it will be up to you to make the most of the opportunity.

RTG: Briefly, give some useful advice to our young readers aspiring to be great musicians like you.

MANOJ: Music is a language and the best way to advance in this field is to study it– what form this study takes is limitless; it could be through the medium of instructional books or video tapes or a good teacher/teachers or a music school. So don't waste time, be prepared and willing to learn, find out what needs to be done and then just do it. Stay focused on formal instruction in music, as without it you cannot really make progress towards becoming 'A Complete Musician'.