



“The Music Room: A Memoir”

ABOUT THE BOOK

A bestselling literary sensation in India, “The Music Room: A Memoir” is a deeply moving meditation on how traditions and life lessons are passed along through generations, the sacrifices made by women through the ages and the power of music.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Musician and journalist Namita Devidayal was born in 1968 and graduated from Princeton University. Her first book, “The Music Room: A Memoir” was a winner of the 2008 Vodafone Crossword Popular Book Award and was named an Outlook book of 2007. Devidayal lives in Mumbai and writes for The Times of India.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE Each book guide follows the weekly Connect: 21CM Book Club discussions led by Sylvia Yang on [Facebook](#) @21CMBookClub. Feel free to follow along with other book club members in real time or read at your own pace.

Welcome to the 12th meeting of Connect: 21CM’s Book Club. Join us as we read “The Music Room: A Memoir” by Namita Devidayal. As both a journalist with The Times of India and a musician, Devidayal has written an inspiring memoir that celebrates the relationship between student and teacher and introduces readers to Indian classical music.

BEFORE YOU READ...

In “The Music Room,” Devidayal recounts her personal experience studying with Dhondutai Kulkarni, a musical disciple of renowned Indian classical singer Alladiya Khan. Kulkarni’s training was rigorous: she instructed a 10-year-old Devidayal to start her musical training by singing just a single note for weeks, progressing with painstaking deliberation through one raga, or musical mode, at a time. Their relationship enfolded the girl in a priceless tradition of knowledge passed down from teacher to student over centuries. As you read of Devidayal’s personal journey with Indian classical music, think of your own journey and how you became the musician that you are today.

AS YOU READ...

We offer a few questions for each chapter so you can dive deeper into your reading.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN:

FEBRUARY 8-14: PAGES 1-70

“I started with the first note, sa. On that first day, to my dismay, Dhondutai made me sing only the base note – the tonal pillar of Indian music which remains unchanged, constant, reliable, and stoically oblivious to the whims and fancies of other notes. It is the foundation, the first and last note, the point at which the circle begins and ends. Within the boundaries of sa, one can play out all of life’s dramas and moods. But every time one gets back to it, there is a sense of closure – like coming home after a long and exciting journey.” (p.15)

Devidayal reminisces about her first lessons with her guru Dhondutai. You can probably remember a similar experience, where your teacher had you work on something repetitive but foundational.

In the comments, share what you remember about your first music lessons. Were you scared? Excited? Confused?

FEBRUARY 15-21: PAGES 70-148

“Later, when it was time for the taans, I knew I did

well, because she turned around twice and said, “Wah! Good job, beta!”” (p. 121)

Recognition from those we admire is often one of the greatest gifts we can receive, and mentorship can play an extremely important role in our career development. Have you had a significant mentor relationship, or received recognition from someone you admire? How did that affect you as an artist? Let us know in the comments.

FEBRUARY 22-28: PAGES 149-225

“My attention was momentarily diverted by the music. She had just sung a brilliant passage, playing on the words of the song. I heard exclamations from the audience which had also been recorded. This was the beauty of live performance. Great music was complete only when the notes from the performer touched the soul of the listener and the sigh of appreciation went back to the musician.” (p. 195)

Devidayal writes about the goal of performers everywhere: that moment of connection, where the performance perfectly resonates with the audience. Have you experienced such a moment? What impression did it make on you?

MARCH 1-7: PAGES 226-310

“I’ve noticed that when a musician is young, her music contains a boisterous quality. She usually wants to show off. When she grows a little older, the focus is on virtuosity. It is only after forty that you truly begin to become an artiste. Your voice changes, your emotions change and therefore your music is bound to change. That’s when the music ages, like a good pickle, and seeps into the musician’s entire being.” (p. 233)

In this passage, Devidayal’s guru Dhondutai describes the growth and development of a musician parallel to personal experience. Have you noticed changes in your own musicianship that are a direct result of your life experiences? Share your thoughts in the comments below!

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR?

We hope you enjoyed February’s book club selection and the dialogue with colleagues on 21CM.org. Do you have a question for the author? Send us your questions via email at bookclub@21cm.org or message your questions on [Facebook](#) to @Connect: 21CMBookClub.