



Photos: Sumi Kantaria

The road from France...

It was an evening of splendour! When a French storyline met Indian settings and was transformed into a beautiful experience -- *The Fakir of Benares* — a concert of European Classical Music and Opera Arias. Conducted by **Fredric Ligler**, the concert was organised with French and Indian musicians at the Kamani Auditorium on Monday.

Presented by the French Embassy, Neemrana Hotels, Alliance Francaise, Delhi Symphony Society, Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra and *The Times of India*, the concert entitled *The Fakir of Benares* is the love story of Sundara and Kandour, directed by **Muzaffar Ali** with choreography by



THE FRENCH CONNECTION:
Anjolie Ela Menon & Francis Wacziarg;
THE SOPRANO:
Aude Priya (left)

French Bharatnatyam dancer **Justine McCarthy** and with costumes designed by **Meera Ali**...

The concert, in three parts, was attended by a bevy of the Capital's beautiful people including **Bina Raman**, jewellery designer **Sunlita Kohli**, Neemrana's **Aman Nath** and **Francis Wacziarg** whose lovely daughter **Aude Priya** was one of the soloists, TV newscaster **Suneet Tandon**, adman **Suhel Seth**, danseuse **Sharon Lowen** with her mother and daughter **Tara**...



Mohammad Sahbi Basyly with his wife



WHAT'S THAT? MK Raina & Naresh Kapuria

The Fakir of Benaras...

Francis Wacziarg was in the Forbidden Palace, with daughter Aude Priya, when Beijing played host to Puccini's *Turandot* in 1998. "That was when the possibility hit me," says the French partner of Neemrana Hotels who has made Delhi his home. And the possibility — of boosting international tourism by linking opera with heritage — concretised when **Frederic Legier** came down with *The Fakir of Benaras*. "An opera set in India has to be performed here!" says the French conductor who will wield the

baton at the concert this evening.

"*Turandot*, set in China, was promoted by international travel agents and music societies," Wacziarg recounts. "Similarly, we will tie up with Sita Travels to coincide their tours with the staging of the opera next February."

There are reasons for Wacziarg's enthusiasm. "Culture and Tourism minister **Ananthakumar** has assured the opera can be staged at Tughlaqabad, Purana Qila or Humayun's Tomb." That's for starters. "Many music societies from India and Europe have shown interest. Imagine the exposure if it shows on global networks!"

There's also the possibility of performing at Avignon. That's no pipe dream -- just look at the talents: **Muzaffar Ali** is to direct, with choreography by **Justine McCarthy**, costume by **Meera Ali**, **Situ Singh Buehler** as soloist and -- yes, **Aude Priya Wacziarg** as soprano.

"This is the first real interaction between Indian and French musicians," Wacziarg points to the 55 musicians on cellos and pianos, bassoons and oboes, flutes and clarinets. "Barring 11, all of them are from Delhi and Kolkata." If all goes well at Kamani, Delhi will again have a symphony orchestra, adds **Gautam Kaul** of Delhi Symphony Society, which is cosponsoring the event with *The Times of India*, Alliance Francaise and Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra.

Western classical music enthusiasts can hear the arias of the Indo-French opera, at the East-West Symphony Orchestra at Kamani this evening at 7 pm.