

Maestro Saskia Rao-de Haas

Cellist | Composer | Cultural Entrepreneur | Educator

Maestro Saskia Rao-de Haas is a world-renowned cellist, composer, cultural entrepreneur, and visionary educator from the Netherlands, whose pioneering artistry and dedication have left an indelible mark on the global music landscape. In April 2025, she was honored with the distinguished Ridder in de Orde van Oranje Nassau by the Dutch monarchy, recognizing her extraordinary contributions to music, education, and cultural diplomacy. Initially trained as a Western classical cellist, Saskia's musical destiny took a transformative turn in 1993 when she encountered Indian music. Under the tutelage of her revered Guru, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, she immersed herself in the world of Indian classical music. Today, she is celebrated as a master performer and is credited with inventing the Indian cello—a unique instrument that seamlessly bridges Eastern and Western traditions. In the words of her Guru, “Her music is a gift from God that everyone should experience.”

Critics and audiences worldwide have lauded Saskia's artistry, describing her performances as “unmatched by any other string instrument,” possessing “the range of an entire orchestra,” and “closest to the human voice.” Her playing has been called “movingly meditative” and “bringing Indian music into a brave new era” by leading international publications.

Saskia Rao-de Haas has graced the world's most prestigious stages and festivals, including the Dover Lane Music Conference (Kolkata), Legends of India (New Delhi), Saptak Festival (Ahmedabad), Vasanta Habba (Bangalore), Maihar Festival, Haridas Sangeet Sammelan (Lucknow), the Kennedy Center (Washington DC), Cello Biennale (Amsterdam), New Directions Cello Festival (USA), Europalia (Brussels), Musée Guimet (Paris), and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (London). Notably, she is the first non-Indian female artist to perform solo at the esteemed Dover Lane Music Conference.

A dynamic collaborator, Saskia frequently performs with her husband, the world-renowned sitar maestro Pandit Shubhendra Rao. Their jugalbandi (duet) and ensemble compositions have enchanted audiences globally since the early 2000s. Since 2014, they are often joined by their prodigiously talented pianist son, Ishaan Leonard Rao, creating a unique family ensemble. She has also collaborated with many of India's most illustrious musicians, including Pandit Jasraj, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Ustad Rashid Khan, and composer Vishal Bhardwaj, further enriching her musical journey.

As an educator, Saskia Rao-de Haas is the founder of the Sangeet4All program, which has empowered over 100,000 children across India by making high-quality music education accessible in schools and communities. Her innovative curriculum and teacher-training initiatives have set a new benchmark for music pedagogy in South Asia. She is the author of eight acclaimed books for children, with her latest, *Shastra*, released by the Asia Society in New York, opening the world of Indian music to young readers. Her immense contributions have been recognized by India's leading cultural icons; Dr. Sonal Mansingh has bestowed upon her the title of Vidushi, honoring her mastery and service to the classical arts.

Artist Statement

"Classical music is a universal treasure that should be accessible to all. My journey is devoted to dissolving the barriers that keep this art form out of reach for so many. Through performance, education, and innovation, I strive to ensure that every child and listener can experience the transformative power, joy, and unity that music brings. By making classical music inclusive, we nurture not only tradition but also the creativity and harmony of future generations."

Maestro Saskia Rao-de Haas stands at the confluence of cultures—a visionary artist, educator, and innovator whose work continues to inspire, empower, and elevate the world of classical music.