

Mrinalini Somani: 'People Did Not Take Me Seriously'

The musician/activist on the seventh WE concert, growing up with the show and being the teenager behind it all

Jessica Xiao • Aug 08, 2019



18-year-old Mrinalini Somani is the brain and muscle behind the WE concert. Photo: Salaam Bombay Foundation

It's mid-evening and my third go at getting in touch with [Mrinalini Somani](#). The Mumbai/Sherborne, U.K. based 18-year-old musician/activist is anything but flighty and I know she's locked in a tight schedule of rehearsals, marketing meetings, scheduling and other stage elements that come into play when you're the brain and muscle behind a concert production. When she finally does answer the phone, she pants a "Hey" and I can hear the fatigue ring through like rain in an open sluice. But what echoes through the speaker is her indefatigable enthusiasm when speaking of the [WE concert](#).

The WE concert is an annual fundraising music project organized by Somani and city-based NGO Salaam Bombay Foundation, supporting the holistic education of underprivileged children who attend the Foundation's arts academy. "This year, we have about 82-86 performers participating in the show," Somani tells *Rolling Stone India*, noting how the participant turnout has been the highest ever.

In its latest edition, WE is all set to bring some jazz with covers of Frank Sinatra, pop music that spans Little Mix and Billie Elish and some rock to the audience too. Somani is bringing down her band from the U.K. to perform as well. "We formed the band in school, so it's quite cool that they can all be there for the show," she says. Also part of the set is a Bollywood medley and music by classical as well as alternative acts. She wasn't kidding when she said WE has something for everybody.

6 weeks of practice have been leading up to what Somani calls the most "exceptional" showcase the kids have ever presented on stage. "I think one of the pieces that would stand out is a performance on 'Somebody To Love' by Queen and that obviously has a lot of harmonies. It's a huge song to perform and I hope that it comes out the way we want it to," she says.

In the last 6 years, the WE concert moved from its incubatory home in Mathurdas Mills' now-defunct Blue FROG to Charni Road's Royal Opera House. This year, the WE concert moves into its biggest venue yet. "Every time one door closes, another one opens," says Somani about how a scheduling conflict led to the stage being shifted to the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA).

The WE concert brings together school-going students from the Salaam Bombay Academy of Arts and the city's many private schools. Drummer [Yohan Marshall](#), vocalist [Sarthak Swami](#) and singer-songwriter [Praveer Barot](#) join Somani in preparing the kids for the big day with rehearsals at [True School of Music](#). "For the first 3 years (of WE), all the rehearsals just happened at my house. All the dancers would be in one room and all the singers would be in another," she laughs, reminiscing.

Somani started the WE concert as a 12-year-old and never imagined the scale it would extend to. Since its inception, the concert has raised over a crore in funds, enabling 1,728 children to not only showcase their talent but also get into academies for dance, theater and musical training. "I would tell my 12-year-old self that it does take a lot more effort than I knew at that point. As I've become older, I've started taking on more responsibility," she says. It's not the same as in 2003 when Somani could put on a show by banding her friends together and spreading the word. In the last few years, she has immersed herself in figuring out the pieces, composition and sound of the concert as well as taken to exploring the marketing side of things, growing and learning with every passing year. "Before, people always just saw me as a kid. If my mum didn't say something or if an adult didn't say the final word, people wouldn't take me seriously," she shares.

With every WE concert, Somani wants to take a song and do something weird with it, trusting that what happens might just pleasantly surprise her. Passing on some advice to her younger self, "It is much bigger than you think and don't get discouraged if the adults don't see you as an adult. Because they will soon," she signs off.

The WE Concert will commence at 6 p.m. on Saturday, August 17th at Mumbai's Jamshed Bhabha Theatre, NCPA. Email info@salaambombay.org to inquire about donor passes. All proceeds from the passes will go to the Salaam Bombay Academy of Arts.

Learn more about the WE Concert [here](#).

Tags:

[blue frog](#) [frank sinatra](#) [Mrinalini Somani](#) [National Centre for the Performing Arts](#) [NCPA](#) [ncpa national centre of performing arts](#) [Praveer Barot](#) [queen](#) [Royal Opera House](#) [Salaam Bombay Foundation](#) [Salaam Bombay Foundation Academy of Arts](#) [Sarthak Swami](#) [True School of Music](#) [WE Concert](#) [Yohan Marshall](#)