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Musical Movement for Pakistani Community

By [KIMBERLY CHOU](#)

When George Mathew began planning a benefit concert for victims of last year's floods in Pakistan, a supporter told him, "It's so nice to hear someone from India doing something for Pakistan."

Mr. Mathew, the founder and artistic director of Music for Life International, a non-profit organization that is presenting a concert on Monday with the American Pakistan Foundation, shrugs off the idea that Indian-Pakistani amity should be surprising.



GEORGE MATHEW

"At the end of the day biriyani is biriyani," said Mr. Mathew, referring to the cultures' shared rice dish. "It is the same biriyani. Indians love biriyani; Pakistanis love biriyani." Being Indian, that the flood occurred in Pakistan was in some ways "more of an incentive" to pitch in, he said. "It's another shared thread for growing community."

At the Beethoven for the Indus Valley benefit at Carnegie Hall, Mr. Mathew will lead an orchestra of musicians from New York and farther afield. Performers include members of the New York Philharmonic, Emerson Quartet and the Philadelphia Orchestra, plus students and faculty from the Juilliard, Manhattan School of Music and other top music schools. Tickets are \$35 to \$199.

Mr. Mathew said the orchestra will perform Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony" for this benefit. The piece, which Mr. Mathew says conveys "a notion of community," seems particularly apt at a time of much strife and disunity in the world.

Proceeds from the concert go to Acumen Fund, a non-profit venture fund that has worked with organizations in Pakistan since 2002. Its Pakistan portfolio of more than \$11 million includes investments in housing, agriculture and drinking water.

Music For Life International has its roots in previous humanitarian concerts that Mr. Mathew organized, the first being a 2006 concert at Carnegie to aid earthquake victims in Kashmir and Pakistan. Beethoven's "Ninth" was also that night's selection.

"At the time, I didn't have any infrastructure and we certainly didn't exist as an organization," said Mr. Mathew, who was then on the conducting staff at the Manhattan School of Music. But via connections in the classical music world, Mr. Mathew said his group was able to secure a date at Carnegie Hall and the participation of musicians like Glenn Dicterow, the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic.

Mr. Mathew put on Requiem for Darfur the following year, performing Verdi's "Requiem"; and Mahler for the Children of AIDS in 2009, performing Mahler's "Third Symphony." Officially incorporated in 2008, Music for Life International received 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status last year and has thus far netted \$130,000 for its causes.

Mr. Mathew also works with a new "training organization" of young musicians, modeled after the Berlin Philharmonic Academy, called Ubuntu-Shruti.

"In a way, the musical material has driven the mission" of Music For Life International, he said. "We could really stand to listen to each other. And I think the task that musicians don't declare often enough is that the act of making music is an act of bearing witness and [listening is part of] the behavior that we need so much today. ... That's sort of, in a fundamental way, what informs these concerts."
