

The Southern News

Conductor gives lecture through music

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Photo Courtesy Sean Meenaghan

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There have been several speakers at Southern this year, who encouraged students to become actively involved in local communities and realize the importance of individual choice. But last week Southern students had a rare opportunity to receive that message from an award winning conductor and humanitarian George Mathew, who did it through classical music.



George Mathew has given lectures in past years at Southern

Mathew visited Southern to present his lecture “Ensemble Music as an Engine for Social Transformation” which took place at Charles Garner recital hall. The lecture revolved around a working rehearsal of Tchaikovsky’s “Serenade for Strings” performed by local musicians.

“It’s really unique to do something like that with a larger group, because we all tried to collaborate and do something different,” said Matt Beckmann, a resident cellist at Music Haven, a non-profit organization that brings classical music to underprivileged youths. “It was fascinating to be a part of that.”

Mathew is a world acclaimed conductor, who lead global humanitarian concerts and is well known in a classical music world for his philanthropic work. During the rehearsal at Southern, he chose a unique way to draw analogies between ensemble music and social awareness, because in his words “it’s central to what we really need and what is possible with resources that are all around us.”

The audience got to see the “nuts and bolts of what’s really going on” when classical music is made, and the amount of work it takes to produce the right notes and sounds, as well as team effort that goes along with it. Mathew stressed the importance of each and every musician, and how significant they are individually, as well as collectively. He came up with ways to show that even the smallest nuances, like one note or a single sound, do not go unnoticed and are crucially important for the entire piece to come together.

“What we are talking about here is adjustment,” said Mathew. “And adjustment requires empathy. And empathy means very, very, very active listening.”

Mathew talked about understanding and trust that needs to exist between the musicians, and people in general, in order to produce anything worthy and meaningful. He even divided the performers into small circles and had them play without much eye contact, and produce music through the technique he called “getting in each other’s heads.”

“[The musicians] have to start with the assumption that what the other person is doing is more important, or at least as important, as what they are doing,” said Mathew.

Determined to showcase the similarities in the ways the energies and responsibilities are distributed in the ensemble versus the communities, Mathew encouraged a dialogue with an audience. Michael Wight, freshman history major, who asked Mathew questions about the tempo and the dynamic of the sound, said he liked watching Mathew at work.

“As a musician myself I appreciate the time he took to explain more intricate details and their role in the general melding of everything,” said Wight. “They were small details, but they mattered even more than the big picture.”

The performance lasted for only an hour and Tina Hadari, resident violinist and executive director of Music Haven, said she wished Mathew had more time to share his unique approach. “It is unusual for a conductor to be that selfless,” Hadari said. “Typically conductors want everyone to look at them for leadership, but he created leaders out of everybody.”