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## Ishaan Leonard Rao

Young Indian pianist and composer Ishaan Leonard Rao is an emerging prodigious talent in the world of music. While The Hindu describes Ishaan as ‘*a bridge to two cultures*’, Morris Stuart, Festival Director of the Desert Song Festival in Australia, says Ishaan ‘*will surely be a significant 21st century artist of the highest order*’

18 year old Ishaan was recently chosen as a SONY MUSIC GROUP GLOBAL SCHOLAR. The only Indian recipient to be chosen from over 70 countries, this prestigious scholarship is awarded to young artists who make a difference in the global musical landscape. India’s leading daily, Indian News Express, featured him as ‘*one of the 5 game-changers*’ in their year ending cultural roundup article “Yearend 2021–Music to the ears”.

Ishaan is currently studying piano under Georgian pianist Giorgi Mikadze with a major in contemporary writing and production at the Berklee College of Music in Boston where, in his first year itself, he received the prestigious certificate for ‘outstanding achievement’ by the piano department.

Ishaan is the son of world-renowned musicians, Pandit Shubhendra Rao and Dutch cellist Saskia Rao-de Haas. Growing up in an environment steeped in music, it is no surprise that he went on to be the youngest Indian ever to finish his ABRAM Grade 8 exam as well as the youngest to be awarded the ARSM performance diploma at the age of 12. Since a very early age, Ishaan has performed with his parents as the Rao Trio, interpreting music from different cultures and exploring the unifying links between them.

Ishaan made his New York concert debut at age 14 when he performed at the prestigious Chhandayan All Night Concert at the Society for Ethical Cultures. By this time, he had already performed to raving reviews in India, France and Australia. On his 13th birthday, Ishaan performed a 45-minute-long program for an international jury as a finalist in the ‘Young Musician of the Year’ award by the Olga and Jules Craen Foundation in Mumbai as the youngest candidate selected.

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Ishaan started learning the sitar and the cello at the age of 3, and the piano at the age of 6. Ishaan has learned from pianists Justin McCarthy, Raj Bhimani, Svetlana Radashkevich and Dimitris Lambrianos. He has followed multiple master classes by Polish pianist Raphael Lustchevsky, French pianist Martine Dellenbach and Dutch pianist Marianne Boer. Ishaan also learned South Indian rhythm from master percussionist Vidwan B.C. Manjunath.

Ishaan is also a socially responsible artist, performing for India's largest fundraising concert 'Art Matters' alongside top artists of the country, the fundraising concert 'Music for Hope' with Change.org, for Takshila Education Society to celebrate World Music Day in a special program titled 'Beyond Boundaries' and for the National Gallery for Modern Arts. Ishaan has created his own 'Piano Project'—an online outreach program with instructional videos & e-books to enable children, especially in India, to learn the basics of piano technique through culturally contextual material and accessible instruments. It's free to download on [www.ishaanleonardrao.com](http://www.ishaanleonardrao.com).

Ishaan's repertoire is as varied as his musical training. From Bach, Mozart and Beethoven to Indian classical music and jazz, not to mention his own compositions, Ishaan connects to it all. With his deep understanding of different stylistic approaches to music, it is not surprising that he started writing his own compositions at the age of 5. Ishaan created music for the program 'Bach to Bhupali' at the Alliance Française in a program including included variations on Philips Glass' Metamorphosis for piano and Indian cello, Indian traditional devotional songs and 'Bartok in Bangalore', a Carnatic-inspired composition of his. His song 'Locked Down' was shortlisted as part of the top ten globally for the Commonwealth Composition Challenge in 2020.

For Ishaan, there are no boundaries in music—Indian, Western, world music, popular. He sees music as a unifying force that brings people together, regardless of their background, with music as the unifying thread. Like the ancient saying, Ishaan is trying to create a world he can live in!