

Flying planes, psychiatry, design and construction by day, music, theatre, radio and comedy by night — meet four Bangaloreans who live on the flip side. **By Shefali Rao**

Double agents

A psychiatrist who has decided that laughter is the best medicine after all, a graphic designer who replaces her sketch book with a mic after hours, a businessman who steps into a different avatar at night, literally, and a pilot who sets the stage on fire with his voice. These four smooth operators tell us a little about what it means to live a Dr Jekyll-Mr Hyde kind of life-style, being focused professionals during the day and sought-after entertainers after sundown.

Comic relief

WHEN we say Dr Shyam Bhat is a psychiatrist who likes to treat your funny bone, we're not joking — it's not everyday that you come across a doctor who moonlights as a stand-up comedian.

Psychiatry was always on the cards. "Initially, I wanted to become a journalist, because I loved writing. But I was inspired by my parents (both doctors) and since I was as interested in the humanities and arts as medicine, psychiatry appealed to me the most," he says. After practising in America for a while, Bhat decided to settle down in Bangalore with his wife and two children because he became aware of the "intense stress levels in India" and felt that he could help out. Thus, the Mind-Body Clinic was born in Indiranagar in 2010. Incidentally, Bhat also hosts a popular show called *Heartline* on Radio Indigo 91.9. Listeners tune in to get a healthy dose of Bhat's professional advice and non-judgemental listening skills — apparently he even talked a suicidal person into a more positive mindset recently through the show.

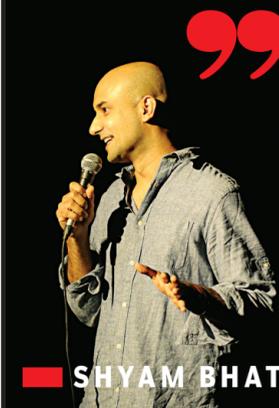
And humour complements his work too. "Becoming too serious is a professional hazard. How can I help people if I lose sight of the lighter side of life?" he asks. "I also love interacting with other comedians. They are witty, intelligent and natural social observers, and that helps me become a better psychiatrist. Also, as part of my job, I tend to deconstruct life, and this helps in stand-up comedy," he adds.

Bhat had his first taste of comic success during his residency programme in the US in 1999. "I won an open mic contest

at a comedy club called The Funny Bone and was asked to be the opening act for touring national comics. I absolutely loved it. But after a few months, I had to quit because of severe work pressures," he recalls.

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SHYAM BHAT

ently politically incorrect, his material includes lots of cross-cultural references — identity crises, immigration, prejudice and gender politics — but patients are off limits. "It's very challenging to find material that is not going to offend anyone. My profession as a psychiatrist is sensitive. I would never want a patient to be uncomfortable or worry that I would use their problems as material," clarifies the comedian who cites Louis CK, Eddie Izzard, Mitch Hedberg and "the great" Woody Allen as his inspirations. Eddie Murphy makes the cut too. "When I was in high school, I saw a video of his live stand-up act, *Delirious and Raw*, and I laughed so much — I never knew that one person talking could be that funny," says Bhat. His never-fail joke, he reveals, is "about a bear with a Kannada punchline that always gets the audience going."

But at the end of the day, his patients win over comedy clubs — "I love both, but psychiatry and medicine are a calling. If I had to choose, stand-up would lose," he states.

Details: shyambhat.com

Hitting the high notes

FOR anyone who has ever complained that 24 hours in a day aren't quite enough, meet Behram Siganporia. The young city-based pilot flies during the day, but in the evenings, stays firmly grounded onstage, fronting his band or hosting karaoke nights. All when he's not striking a pose for the camera — he also dabbles in modelling.

"Ever since I was a little boy, I've wanted to fly," Siganporia tells us. "I went to flight school in Florida and while there,



BEHRAM SIGANPORIA

was offered a job with a private charter company in Bangalore, so I returned," he explains. And he was only too happy to come back to his mother and sister, confessing that behind the macho image, he's a "complete mama's boy."

Describing himself as extremely easygoing, this self-taught musician (he also plays the guitar) is clearly a multitasker. At night, he wows crowds as the lead singer of popular city-based band One Nite Stand, which he joined in 2009. They cover a range of genres from rock 'n' roll to pop, but ask Siganporia about his musical influences and pat comes the reply: "Freddie Mercury and Elvis Presley."

His musical journey began during college in Mumbai (HR College of Commerce & Economics), where he sang for the band The Other People. Incidentally, it was after making waves onstage at various college fests and gigs that his modelling career took off — he's done ads for brands like Ray-Ban since. But right now, he is focusing mostly on One Nite Stand's untitled album, currently in production. Because, as he puts it, "(his) musical career is taking off faster than an aircraft." They've even got offers from Bollywood and though he admits his Hindi isn't great, the band's cover of *Bhaag DK Bose* is often the most requested.

twice as good

the city's most loved voices.

"I studied in Chittrakala Parishath College of Fine Arts. Why art? Because I didn't want to study," Mendens tells us, laughing. Then adds as an afterthought, "I love drawing. It's paid off because I have no Monday morning blues. And I enjoy even the boring stuff. My idea of work is taking up something challenging."

Mendens is a naturally gifted singer with no formal training. "I joined choirs, but I really got into the spotlight when someone else left, so I was pushed into a lead slot and people noticed me," says the lady, who cites classic jazz as her biggest musical influence. Events like winning what was supposedly the first karaoke championship in Bangalore, made a difference, she recalls. "It was a proper karaoke club above Chachi Towers (Residency Road) way before karaoke became as popular as it is now. And I won their first championship — a plastic trophy that I keep throwing out and my dad keeps bringing back," she says, smiling. "Growing up, my dad really pushed us to explore our talents," she adds (her two brothers were state-level sportspersons).

Armed with a reservoir of talent and lots of paternal encouragement, Mendens plunged into karaoke events, musical theatre and joined various bands

PRIYA MENDENS



Pic: Opus

So how does he find the time to shuffle between all these gigs? "When the aviation industry went through a slump a while ago, I didn't have too much work, which is when I joined the band," he elaborates, adding, "now my company is switching aircraft, so I have some spare time. And I make sure I'm off on Wednesdays, when I host karaoke nights at Opus. Plus, I don't drink or smoke, so I'm always aware of my bearings." As for the professional hazards — "A lot of random girls add me on Facebook," he admits, adding bashfully, "there is some fan mail, but I guess that's because I'm the frontman of the band. I'm not complaining though — some of those messages make my day." So what does he do when he has a little time on his hands to himself? "Just sleep!" he replies.

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Moonlight queen

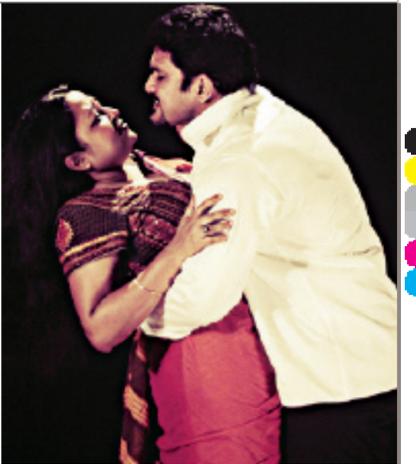
SHE'S been compared to jazz icon Ella Fitzgerald, even though she insists that she sometimes still thinks of herself as a "bathroom singer." And when she's not crooning away, she's busy designing letterheads, logos and more at her day job as the design head at event management company, Trump It Entertainment & Creative Services. But with her 'can do' attitude, it's no wonder that Priya Mendens has still found the time to become one of

(including one named Motte Dosas). Her acting talents came to the fore too. "I once played the mother of Jesus in a play. During rehearsals, a lady came and asked me if I'd lost a child, because she said it came across in my voice. I told her I wasn't even married," she says, adding, "the edge I have is that I'm not just a singer, I'm a performer."

Singing six nights a week on an average, coupled with her day job as a designer, eventually caused her to damage her vocal chords four years ago. "It was terrifying and it took me almost three years to recover and get back on stage. No one realised that I was going through psychological trauma too. It's like a runner losing his leg," she says. Incidentally, it was a sports coach who finally helped her get back her confidence. "People first place you on a pedestal and then just wait for you to come crashing down. So I knew I had to get back up," she says candidly.

However, Mendens now selectively chooses the productions that come her way. A Broadway show next month with restaurant-cum-music space Opus is in the pipeline. And starring recently as the popular character, Lady of the Lake, in Monty Python's *Spamalot* gave her a real high. "In school, I was always pegged as the boy. So without a musical background, to be singing on a stage as the lead, even if it is just in Bangalore, is a wow factor for me," she concludes.

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ABHIJEET SHETTY

Building blocks

Businessman Abhijeet Shetty switches roles quite efficiently. He spends an entire day building roads but come evening, he holds audiences spellbound with his theatrics. "I work in my family business, SRC Constructions, which deals with roads. I did my civil engineering (from Dayanand Sagar College of Engineering), my father founded the company in 1970 and I've been working there for six years now," he explains. Being his own boss makes it easy for him to dabble in theatre, a passion he developed during his final year of college after he performed in a Hindi play titled *Hawaladar Bahadur Singh*, written by a friend. And there's been no looking back since. "I am an attention seeker, so being on stage is perfect," he states, quite frankly. He recently played Tiplu Sultan in Girish Karnad's play *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* at Jagriti, directed by Arundhati Raja. Despite a demanding schedule, Shetty finds time management a cinch. "I get done with work by evening, then go on stage and perform. I take time off for rehearsals if I know there's a play coming up. Sure, it means more work and less holidays, but that's okay," he tells us. Being a skilled actor has other advantages. "Construction work is all about deadlines. It's a high stress job, so sometimes we need to think of creative reasons as to why something wasn't done and acting comes in handy then," he says with a chuckle. Balancing passions is currently a bit tough, he admits, especially since he recently got married and is still "in the honeymoon-vacation stage." But he will always find time, because as he puts it, "Till 5 pm, I feed my stomach with my day job but after that, I feed my soul with theatre."

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— Abhijeet Shetty

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