

NPO Music Sharing

ICEP Nepal 2024 Tour Report

Compiled by Maya Williams, Intern Coordinator, ICEP Nepal

December 16-27, 2024



Photo: Food For Life Nepal

Introduction

In December 2024, NPO Music Sharing's International Community Engagement Program (ICEP) in Nepal touched the lives of over 1,000 people through impactful musical experiences. This year's ICEP Quartet featured violinists Midori Goto and Ellinor D'Melon, violist Charlotte Stickel, and cellist Annette Jakovic. Coordinated by intern coordinator Maya Williams, the tour fostered goodwill and friendship in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal, in collaboration with 19 local organizations.

The Quartet's repertoire included selections from Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, Saint-Saëns' Carnival of the Animals, and Rossini's William Tell Overture. Preparation for the tour took place throughout the fall, with rehearsals held in Berlin, Germany, and Nepal.

Food For Life Nepal

December 16, 2024



Photo: Food For Life Nepal

About: Food for Life Nepal (FFL), a non-governmental, non-religious organization, works to combat childhood hunger by providing free, nutritious midday meals to over 10,000 students across 26 schools in Kathmandu. <https://foodforlife.org.np/>

The ICEP Quartet began their day at FFL with a kitchen tour, observing the preparation and delivery of meals. At Tilingtar Secondary School, a beneficiary of FFL, the Quartet visited and performed in classrooms from early childhood through Grade 6. After lunch, they gave four performances: two for Grades 7 and 8 on the main campus and two more for Grades 9 and 10 at the school's junior high school location. The visit concluded with Nepali songs sung by several students and staff. In total, 955 students and 60 staff members participated in the day's programs.

Kathmandu University Music Department

December 17, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: The Kathmandu University Music Department, led by Prof. Lochan Rijal, exists to conserve and to advance Nepali musical traditions through the study, practice, performance, and documentation of music. This department is a testament to Prof. Rijal's commitment and dedication to keep traditional Nepali music alive and thriving. Currently, restoration work is underway on the Tripureshwor Mahadev Temple, which was completely damaged and destroyed during the 2015 earthquake, around which the new facilities of the Music Department are being built, and it serves as a national center to preserve and promote heritage of Nepali music.

<https://www.kumusic.edu.np/kumusic/>

The musicians of the Kathmandu University Music Department welcomed the ICEP party with an outdoor performance of traditional Nepali music. The visit featured musical performances by the department members showcasing traditional Nepali music and by the ICEP musicians presenting Western classical music. As part of a cultural

exchange, two Nepali musicians introduced and demonstrated their instruments: the *ghyaling*, a double-reed instrument, and the *madal*, a percussion instrument.

University students participated in a lively question-and-answer session with the ICEP musicians, fostering further learning and connection. Prof. Rijal also delivered a presentation on the history of the Hindu Tripureshwor Mahadev Temple, the restoration efforts, and Nepali music traditions.

This visit marked the second collaboration between ICEP and the Kathmandu University Music Department. During their previous collaboration, the department was housed in a temporary location in Bhaktapur.

Hopeful Home

December 17, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Hopeful Home, located on the outskirts of Kathmandu, provides shelter, food, education, and a warm, loving environment for children aged 5-19 who have faced significant life challenges, including the loss of parents, poverty, and abandonment. Most children are referred to Hopeful Home through governmental agencies.

<https://hopefulhomenepal.org/>

At Hopeful Home, the ICEP Quartet performed for the resident children and staff (18 children and 6 adults). Each instrument was introduced in an engaging and interactive manner, demonstrating their different pitch ranges. The children were thrilled to have had the chance to get up close to the different instruments and musicians, feeling the vibrations, using the bow, and learning more about the instruments firsthand.

Members of Hopeful Home also performed traditional Nepali dances, after which conversations between musicians and the children continued over supper.

Koshish

December 18, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Koshish provides mental health services to women from across Nepal and is unique as the only institution of its kind in the country. Many of the women at Koshish have faced traumatic life circumstances, including trafficking, abandonment, and homelessness. The organization operates a residential care facility outside of Kathmandu, where women live together and receive comprehensive services. A majority of its staff are former clients, providing scientific and medical treatment complemented by empathy and the firsthand knowledge of challenges faced in society. Additionally, Koshish works to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness in Nepal.

<https://koshish.org.np/>

The ICEP Quartet was warmly welcomed by the residents of Koshish, who greeted them with smiles and enthusiasm. A brief rehearsal preceded the performance, which then was followed by the women singing a traditional Nepali song together. Afterwards, everyone engaged informally with each other, sharing their love of music and asking questions. The Quartet also learned about the services offered by Koshish and a brief history of mental health and social welfare in Nepal, as well as issues particular to women in need in their society.

Naad Sangeet Pathshala

December 18, 2024



Photo: Naad Sangeet Pathshala

About: Naad Sangeet Pathshala (Naad Music School), founded by Nepali tabla player Sarita Mishra, offers free lessons in tabla, flute, guitar, and voice to over 100 underprivileged children, mostly girls, in Kathmandu, many of whom reside in nearby orphanages and have experienced significant trauma. The school's mission is to share the joy of music while helping youth build self-esteem and confidence. Sarita, who began learning tabla at a young age when it was rare for women to pursue music, was the only female student in a class of 72 men, breaking barriers as a trailblazer in Nepali music. Naad Sangeet Pathshala is supported by the Shikshya Foundation.

<https://shikshyafoundationnepal.org/works2/naad-sangeet-pathshala/>

The ICEP Quartet performed for the students, who reciprocated with traditional Nepali music on the tabla and flute. The musicians and students also discussed different learning methods and musical genres. The exchange emphasized shared learning and strengthened connections.

Kanti Children's Hospital

December 19, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Nepal's only pediatric hospital, Kanti Children's Hospital provides free medical care with support from the Embassy of Japan. With 365 beds across eight wards, the hospital offers a wide range of services and high-quality medical treatment, including urgent care, inpatient and outpatient care, laboratory services, and more.

<https://kantichildrenhospital.gov.np/en>

At Kanti Children's Hospital, the ICEP Quartet delivered a variety of performances to patients, staff, and family members. These included bedside performances, community room presentations, and ward-wide concerts. Additionally, musicians performed in waiting rooms for parents and families, both solo (unaccompanied repertoire) and in duos. Over 350 people benefited from these performances, which brought moments of joy and comfort to the hospital environment.

Koseli School

December 20, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Koseli School is a center for children located in the slums of Kathmandu. The school provides warm food, clothing, hygiene services, and high-quality education to the students from marginalized communities, from early childhood through Grade 6.

<https://nepalkoseli.blogspot.com/>

At the Koseli School the ICEP Quartet gave a performance for each of the grades, for a total of over 120 students. Following their performances, the Quartet and all students joined together in the school's courtyard, where several students gave a performance of Nepali dance and music, in traditional attire. The musicians were also treated to a sampling of the day's lunch at the school, which was freshly prepared, spicy, and delicious.

Dilasha Community Center

December 20, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Dilasha works to reduce the barriers that children face in continuing their education in the rural villages of the Kathmandu Valley. In the mountainous regions, it is not uncommon for children to have to trek a few hours each way to reach school. Dilasha's initiatives include after-school programs that provide one hour of academic tutoring and one hour of life-skills education, covering topics such as hygiene, children's rights, and more. <https://consolemission.org/>

After a long drive through the winding mountain roads of the Kathmandu Valley, the ICEP party arrived at one of Dilasha's community centers in a remote mountain village. Performing while seated on the floor to be at eye level with the children, the Quartet created an intimate and engaging atmosphere. Curious villagers gathered to listen, filling the small community center and even watching from outside the doorway.

Kathmandu Music Institute

December 21, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: The Kathmandu Music Institute offers lessons in Nepali traditional instruments as well as Western instruments such as the violin, cello, and piano. Both Western classical and Nepali music are taught, and the school's founder, Sabin Muniker, is passionate about integrating Nepali music with Western instruments.

<https://kathmandumusicinstitute.com/>

During the ICEP Quartet's visit, both the Quartet and the students and teachers of the Kathmandu Music Institute performed for each other. Repertoire chosen by the Music Institute included traditional Nepali music arranged for western-style instruments including the violin, keyboard, and percussion. Sabin spoke about his dedication to preserving Nepali music and adapting it for non-Nepali instruments, such as the violin. The musicians also conducted breakout sessions, offering lessons and answering questions about Western instruments.

Ama Ghar

December 21, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Ama Ghar is a children's home located just south of Kathmandu, housing 45 at-risk children, aged 4-18. The home provides a nurturing environment with shelter, food, clothing, and care, fostering a strong sense of community and family. Many of the children have faced significant trauma and tragedy. <https://ama-foundation.org/>

At Ama Ghar, the ICEP Quartet performed for the children and staff, introducing their instruments and demonstrating their unique sounds. The children then presented a program they had curated themselves, featuring performances of dance, guitar, and singing. The day ended joyfully with everyone, including the ICEP team, dancing together to popular Nepali songs.

CHILDREN-Nepal

December 23, 2024



Photo: Midori Goto

About: CHILDREN-Nepal is based in Pokhara, focusing on youth and striving to improve the livelihood of many at-risk Nepalis, living on the margins of society, through many projects in education, healthcare, vocational training, and more. Handicrafts created and sold by CHILDREN-Nepal are guaranteed to be fair-trade.

<https://childrennepal.org.np/>

At the CHILDREN-Nepal, the ICEP musicians shared music with three different groups. The activities started at a school located in the slum area of Pokhara, supported by CHILDREN-Nepal. The ICEP musicians gave students an intimate musical experience, with individual classroom visits and engaging with them. Following their time at the school, the musicians went to the CHILDREN-Nepal office campus, and presented to their IT and vocational classes and parent groups.

INF Green Pastures Hospital

December 23, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: For nearly 60 years, Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara has provided care for individuals with Hansen's Disease. Serving approximately 11,000 patients annually, it is the region's primary leprosy and rehabilitation hospital, also treating patients with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities. The hospital offers services to all, regardless of financial status. <https://www.inf.org/our-work/green-pastures-hospital/#>

During their visit, the ICEP musicians attended a presentation on the hospital's history and the status of Hansen's Disease in Nepal. Over lunch, prepared by a former patient who is now an exceptional chef, they discussed the stigma and cultural challenges surrounding the disease. The musicians performed for patients, families, and staff, and even gave impromptu mini-performances for individual patients after the formal portion of the program was over, bringing joy and connection to many. The performance of the ICEP musicians was well-received by patients and their families, and staff.

Empowering Women of Nepal

December 24, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Empowering Women of Nepal aims to improve the lives of Nepali women and girls through adventure sports and tourism. Founded in 1999 by three pioneering Nepali sisters, EWN trains women to become trekking guides, offering skills in English, hygiene, homestay management, and more. <https://ewn.org.np/>

The ICEP musicians performed for female trekking guides and trainees. Afterward, women from two regions of Nepal presented traditional dances, showcasing their cultural heritage.

Shree Amar Singh Model Secondary School

December 24, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: At Shree Amar Singh Model Secondary School, students with and without visual impairments receive highest-quality education. The extensive Blind Section is supported by Nepal Association of the Blind (NAB). Students who are visually impaired live on campus, and are provided support and community by staff and their peers. <https://amv.edu.np/>

The ICEP Quartet performed for the visually impaired students and staff, allowing them to explore the instruments through touch and sound. After the performance, students proudly shared their own music, playing songs on keyboards and percussion instruments.

Children Welfare Scheme Nepal

December 25, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Children Welfare Scheme Nepal (CWSN) works to improve the lives of Nepali youth by empowering families, communities, and children. Among its many initiatives, CWSN operates a children's home for rescued street boys, providing food, housing, and care. <https://www.cwsn.org/>

On Christmas Day, the ICEP musicians performed at the Boy's Home at the main headquarters of Children Welfare Scheme Nepal where excitement filled the air. The boys eagerly shared their performances and artworks, making the day a memorable celebration of creativity and connection.

Kopila Nepal

December 25, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: Kopila Nepal protects the rights of children, women, and individuals with disabilities. It runs safe houses and emergency centers for women and their children who have experienced trauma, including abuse, mental illness, and trafficking.

<https://www.kopilanepal.org.np/>

At Kopila Nepal, women from three shelters gathered at the main facility to attend a performance by the ICEP musicians. The audience responded with enthusiasm, singing Nepali songs accompanied by the *madal*, a traditional drum. About 30 women and children participated in this joyful event. About 30 women and their children were in attendance.

Shree Mahendra Jana Sahayog Basic School

December 26, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: The Shree Mahendra Jana Sahayog Basic School is sponsored by Peak Aid Japan, the NPO established in Japan by the mountaineer and climber Ken Noguchi. A primary school in the rural outskirts of Pokhara, the Shree Mahendra Jana Sahayog Basic School is a primary school. Peak Aid has helped rebuild the school, train teachers, and implement a strong curriculum, empowering the entire village.

<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13912031>; <https://peak-aid.or.jp/>

The ICEP Quartet reached the village near the Shree Mahendra Jana Sahayog Basic School after about an hour's drive from Pokhara and were met warmly by the school's former principal Bal Bahadur Godar. The children were captivated by the performance and thrilled to see the instruments up close. The story of William Tell, told alongside the music, resonated deeply with them as they connected it to their own local hero, Thapa Godar Upakar, who played a key role in rebuilding their school.

United Nations Conflict Victims

December 27, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: In any conflict, countless victims remain voiceless, an undeniable and unjustifiable violation of human rights. The Nepalese Civil War, according to some estimates, claimed no fewer than 13,000 lives over a decade, with 1,300 still missing and an unknown number of victims of torture and conflict-related sexual violence. More than 66,000 conflict-related cases remain uninvestigated and unresolved, even eight years after the official signing of the peace accords. While the UN played a crucial role in ending the conflict between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal—establishing a monitoring body for arms and armies and providing a platform for peace talks—the voices and suffering of the victims must not be forgotten.

<https://www.colorado.edu/asmagazine/2024/09/20/pursuing-long-awaited-justice-victims-nepals-peoples-war#:~:text=According%20to%20United%20Nations%20estimates,c onflict%2Drelated%20sexual%20violence%20victims;>

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/10/422982-report-nepal-conflict-un-human-rights-chief-voices-concern-over-pace-and-extent>

For this specially organized event with the UN Messenger of Peace, the United Nations invited war victims to share their progress and recount the challenges they face, fostering healing and offering support.

The event began with opening remarks by Ms. Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, the Resident Coordinator at UN Nepal, and Midori, the UN Messenger of Peace. Performances by the ICEP Quartet were interspersed throughout the program, complementing the reports and personal accounts shared by the victims and their representatives. The event was deeply emotional, with raw and painful stories from women who had lost their rights, dignity, and loved ones—losses that remain officially unrecognized. Yet, amid the sorrow, there was an incredible sense of unity and support among all those in attendance.

Muscular Dystrophy Foundation

December 27, 2024



Photo: Maya Williams

About: The Muscular Dystrophy Foundation-Nepal (MDF) serves individuals with muscular dystrophy across Nepal. Founded by Karuna Pokharel after the loss of her 17-year-old son to muscular dystrophy, the organization provides essential services with the support of the Embassy of Japan in Nepal. These services include health camps, medical examinations, physiotherapy, and counseling for children with muscular dystrophy and their families. <https://mdfoundation.org.np/>

At the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation, the ICEP musicians performed for patients, their families, and staff members. The musicians were warmly welcomed by Karuna Pokharel, along with the MDF staff and families. After the performance, each musician was honored with a scarf, presented by a muscular dystrophy patient—a heartfelt gesture of gratitude and connection.

Reflections From Maya, Intern-Coordinator



Photo: Food For Life

I landed in Kathmandu for the pre-tour visit in mid-November. Until recently, I had never even imagined I would be in Nepal - definitely not in the Japanese Embassy in its capital, meeting with UN employees, and executive directors of impactful NGOs. *Who am I to be here, meeting with such esteemed and successful leaders?* I felt hesitant at first. As I went from place to place, from office to school to health center, I became more confident in myself, speaking with more assurance. This assurance was found through the answer of the question of “why?”. *Why do you want to bring music to our organization? What is the point?*

It took some of my own reflections to answer this question - we were not providing food or medical care. We were providing an experience, and in speaking in a way that felt personal, I shared that music can give us so much that is intangible - a moment away from suffering or the hecticness of life, a connection, a memory, maybe even something healing for the soul.

Though we were unfamiliar to one another, through these conversations, trust was built between the organizations and myself, and between myself and the organizations. Though I was in Nepal alone, I never felt lonely. I was surprised by the hospitality and

altruism of the Nepali people. Always wanting to share a cup of tea, a story, or a snack, I was welcomed warmly nearly everywhere I went. I felt this even from the many InDrive (local equivalent to Uber) drivers who went the extra mile to make sure I got to my destination by calling and speaking with whomever was supposed to receive me. I thought about how this would not happen in the States. I reflected on how even in a “poor” nation, people could be so giving - and even more so than in a “rich” nation.



Upon arriving back to Nepal for the ICEP tour, I felt like I was greeted by old friends at each organization. There was always energy and excitement in the air, anticipation for the event that I sensed from the children and adults alike. Different instruments, unique sounds, foreign people, and Western classical music all brought about curiosity. In many of the places we went, where people had suffered

trauma and abuse, it was hard for me to fathom their histories from the short time we had with them. I felt sincere joy from women who had in their past experienced trafficking, genuine curiosity from orphaned children, and felt the power of sharing music within myself.

I put so much into the coordination of the tour, and yet I feel as though I learned and gained more than I gave. The lessons in giving even when you do not have much, the connection of sharing a smile or a conversation, and the power of music proved more true to me than ever. On a personal level, I improved my own confidence as I realized that it might not be so crazy for me to be in a meeting with such esteemed people working on important issues. I, too, can belong in a room of people, making impact.



Reflections From Midori, Founder, NPO Music Sharing



Photo: Food For Life

After spending almost two weeks in Nepal, the final day felt as if I had just arrived. It was truly a gift to connect with the incredible people we met there—children and the adults alike, many of whom had endured abuse, trafficking, or abandonment. These individuals exemplify courage and embody the resilience of the human spirit. Their open hearts inspired us deeply and taught us the true meaning of connection.

It was especially joyful for me to return to Nepal after about a decade and witness firsthand how much more music is starting to penetrate into the lives of people. The opportunity to further deepen this connection through more music was incredibly rewarding. I hope it will continue to nurture their aspirations, sustain their hopes, and inspire their motivation for years to come.

Much has changed in the eight short years since my previous trip, while other things remain untouched. (The previous ICEP Nepal took place in 2016, and there was a COVID lockdown around the globe, which wiped a few years off all of us.) Appreciation for Western-style music has undoubtedly grown, with music classes

increasingly becoming part of school curricula and private music instruction more widely available. The coffee culture that has erupted in Kathmandu creates an almost misleading sense of modernization. Most of the NGO staff members I had met from the previous trip are now stationed elsewhere. The children's comfort with English was impressive, to say the least, and their fearless curiosity fuels their motivation to improve their lives. Meanwhile, the unlawful yet persistent caste system continues to uphold rigid social barriers.

The beauty of the mountains renews one's respect for Mother Nature.



Traffic lights in Kathmandu both exist and don't. I noticed them because they are rare, but even when present, reportedly only about five out of over 350 actually function. The Prithvi Highway, connecting Kathmandu and Pokhara, remains in challenging condition, with ongoing construction, major remnants of monsoon-season mudslides, obstructed roads, and countless potholes, turning what should be a two-hour journey into an impressive ten. And yes, the lack of heat—or perhaps the ambivalence towards the comfort it offers—remains unchanged. Jackets and coats are shed to enjoy the sun's warmth outdoors, only to be put back on indoors, where tiled floors feel icy-cold once shoes are removed, leaving only a thin layer of socks as protection. So we learn to wear multiple layers of clothes. Not a big deal. These are my *potpourri* of observations.



One of the "other" aspects of the ICEP experience for me is getting to know the young musicians and the administrative intern. It is always a great pleasure to watch these remarkable individuals grow through their

participation in ICEP. They bring with them values shaped by their upbringing and personal histories, and throughout the project, they reflect deeply on what it means to be who we are, who we aspire to be, and who we have the potential to become in this fast-paced, tech-driven world of 2024, where our lives can sometimes feel reduced to a

series of TikTok-style Shorts. They are constantly challenged to step outside their comfort zones of Instagram, YouTube, Uber, and DoorDash.



I also see them grappling with the meaning and power of music, questioning their place within it and its role in their lives. It is a time of growth—not just for them, but for me as well—as we immerse ourselves in an unfamiliar culture and come together in the shared experience of music.

Traveling through a country in this way, with ICEP, is always an extraordinary experience. As we share, we are shared with; as we bring, we are given the gift of acceptance. The dedicated personnel of various organizations and NGOs work tirelessly for the people they serve, and it was deeply gratifying to join them in providing something, however small, that could make a difference. Through their work and our collaboration, we gained a deeper understanding of Nepal—not just as a place, but as a nation filled with potential and possibility, and of ourselves as musicians and human beings.



We are grateful to all our sponsors, friends, collaborators, partnering organizations, and hosting institutions who made this ICEP Nepal possible and for their assistance in having made our journey meaningful and impactful.



