

Celebrations

2012



On the Eve of all things good

SWEET OLD WAYS

At the BG coffee shop, Mehli Irani sits with his wife Dhan and a bunch of old-timers. Irani, a well-known cricketer and member for over 50 years, has seen many things, including several New Year's Eve celebrations hosted by Bombay Gymkhana. "It was good fun. The party would go on till three in the morning and you would see people leave by five with the milkman," he laughs.

Bombay Gymkhana has always made an effort to make these events large, a sentiment shared by Dhan Irani. "Whatever Bombay Gymkhana does, it does it in a grand way — even the New Year's Eve celebration...for that, we are very proud. A lot of money is spent and no stone is left unturned."

Picture watching a Merchant Ivory movie with women dressed in flowing dresses, men in suits and ties, and a live band playing the mambo, jive, cha-cha and classy ballroom music. The whole place comes alive at the central wooden stage, with energy pouring out to the rows of surrounding tables. Tents for food and a lively bar add to the merriment. As the clock strikes midnight, the sky bursts with fireworks — Welcome to New Year's Eve at the Gym.

New Year's Eve celebrations at the Club are a thing of tradition, finds AARON RODRIGUES as he gets members to swim through the ages on waves of joyous memories.



The Iranis, partygoers of the '60s and '70s, fondly reminisce about the past. "Those days were good fun with friends; you can't get them back." BG member Vinaya Saijwani adds, "It was more formal back then; it reminds me of an era that will not come back."

One would not be permitted to enter the festivities in improper attire. Bands such as Maurice Concessio, Nelly and the Band and Chic Chocolate would entertain the crowds. "In those days, the party used to go on till the wee hours, as there were no restrictions," says Gulam Vahanvati, former Gym President (2003 to 2006). "The enthusiasm level was different in my times (or maybe I am outdated) but it was more subdued," R.S. Mandrekar, a member, adds. Food was generally cooked by the Gymkhana kitchen staff. "We used to cook for over 1,000 people," says Rafique Khan from the kitchen.

Background image: © Billy Fung/Alamy; Photo: M.F. Fuchs/istock

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A major reason for attending these functions was a sense of camaraderie among fellow sportsmen. The badminton gang would occupy their own table, as would the rugby boys, the footballers and so on. Marshall Fernandes, who has worked at the Gymkhana for nearly 25 years, says, "We used to place members and guests based on their sports and the charts were set accordingly."

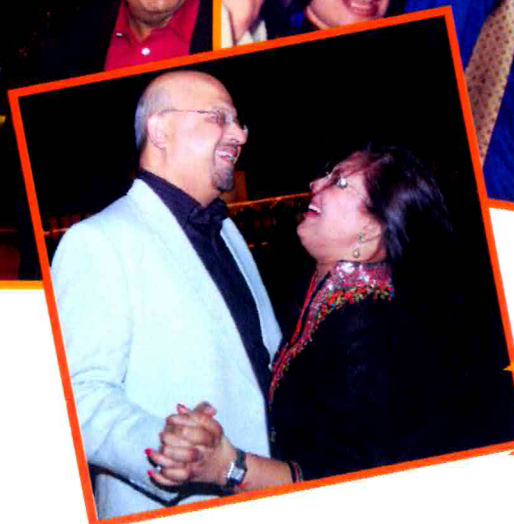
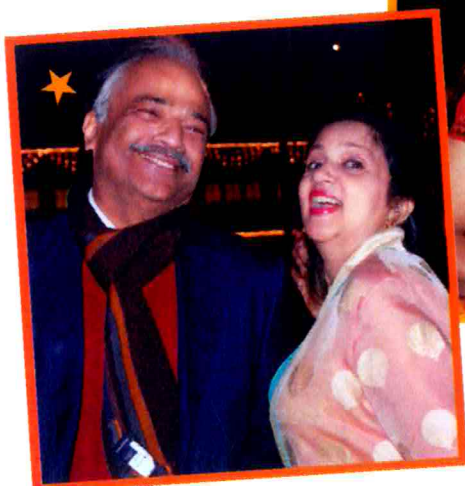
SWINGING WITH THE TIMES

During the '60s, '70s and early '80s, attendance was about 700 to 1,200 people. However, by the late '80s and early '90s, crowd participation fizzled out to 300 to 400. In part, the decline in numbers was due to competition from other clubs, lack of promotion and the introduction of BMC music regulations. However, Bombay Gymkhana would recover and resurrect itself in a big way.

To bring back the crowd, the Gymkhana became less stringent with regulations. Formal attire was reduced to smart casuals. Instead of only Continental food, there was a variety of culinary options — Indian, Chinese, Italian and Mediterranean. The bashes became more eventful; in 2007, a percussionist was brought in along with a DJ. Members were placed according to their preferences (closer to the food court, dance floor or the bar) and not grouped according to sports.



"I think it became bigger; a place to be at. The setup, lights, music, food, everything was grander. From having a crowd of just around 200-300 people, we now had nearly 3,000!" says member Neil White. In 2010, the crowd reached 3,500.





BIGGER AND BIGGER

In recent years, DJs became the centre of the celebrations, replacing the old bands. You could find renowned DJs such as DJ Shiva partying with the crowd. However, sensing the need and relevance of a band, the organisers have brought them back. "We will have a live band again this year — InfraRed & Rohan. Then the party will shift to the Dining Hall, where our in-house DJ, Viraf, takes over," says Food and Beverage manager, Supreo Chatterjee.



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courtesy: Neil White

During the millennium, Gary Lawyer was invited to perform. Cyrus Broacha remembers the show very clearly; after all, he did sing a few Elvis songs after midnight to keep the crowd jiving in their blue suede shoes. "I not only sang ELVIS, I also hosted the bash after the host had an ugly fall off the stage during the countdown," he jokes.

★ Despite the grandness of more recent parties, some members still miss the fun of the '90s. "In our time, it was done on a smaller scale, but we were happy to be closer together," says White. Yasmin Achrekar, BG's dancing member, agrees: "I miss the floor shows from the early nineties."

Preparations for the Eve begin in October. To ensure the best, caterers and bands are booked by early November. Setting up the dance floor takes seven days — four just to level the grounds.

In a few weeks from now, the stage will be set and, on the 31st, members old, young and new will pack the lawns to create new memories. **B&G**



Game time!

(Answers for page 46)



Identify the cartoon character:

1. Goofy
2. Tintin
3. Droopy
4. Richie Rich
5. Scrooge McDuck (Uncle Scrooge)
6. Granny (from Tweety Bird)

