

## 'Alam Ara' set off Bollywood's musical odyssey

Mumbai - 'Alam Ara', the first Indian talkie that completes 75 years this week, was the harbinger of a new art form - film music. The industry is worth about \$200 million today.

When sound was introduced into cinema by filmmaker Ardeshir Irani using a single sound system for dialogues as well as musical tracks in his 1931 film, he would scarcely have imagined the lasting impact it would leave on the Indian psyche.

The doyen of playback singing in films, Lata Mangeshkar, said: 'I was just two years old at that time so I do not remember watching 'Alam Ara'. But I can imagine the impact it might have had.

'In any case my family was already into filmmaking and the development was a natural progression for us. Moreover we were more into classical and folk music. Film music came purely as a professional trade to me,' Mangeshkar, often called the nightingale of India, told IANS.

Phirozeshah Mistry and Behram Irani composed the music for the song - first of seven in the film - sung by the country's first film singer Wazir Mohammad Khan, who also played the role of a beggar in it.

Khan, who died unsung in [Mumbai](#) in 1974, crooned: 'De de khuda ke naam pe pyare, taqat ho dene ki; Kuchh chahe to maang le mujhse, himmat ho gar lene ki.'

The song, which became a roaring hit, had for musical accompaniment just a harmonium, tabla and a violin and no records were issued.

The popularity of 'Alam Ara's' songs led moviemakers to drastically increase the number of songs in their movies - the 1932 film 'Indrasabha' had a staggering 71 songs.

However, most songs did not last more than a few lines as in those days the length was determined by the time available on the record - around three minutes.

The biggest thrust to film music came a year after 'Alam Ara', with the debut in 1934 of perhaps the biggest figure in film music history - Kundan Lal Saigal (1904-1947) - with a movie for the Calcutta-based New Theatres.

A generation of later singers like Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar and Mukesh emerged on to the music scene following the Saigal style of singing that was nasal and baritone.

Veteran maestro Naushad reminisces: 'The three greatest contributions of New Theatres was K.L. Saigal, the orchestra and social films. Saigal simply seeped into the nook and corner of India.

'The song 'Balam aye baso more man mein' that he sang in 'Devdas' (1935) just drove people crazy despite the fact that Saigal was not classically trained.'

Almost simultaneously came the first Indian woman composer, Saraswati Devi, with 'Jawani Ki Hawa' (1935).

She went on to compose hits like 'Main ban ki chiriya' in the Ashok Kumar-Devika Rani starrer 'Achhut Kanya' (1936) and the first patriotic Indian film song 'Chal chal re naujawan' in 'Bandhan' (1940).

The 1940s saw a host of talented singers, including Suraiya, Noorjehan, Shamshad Begum and Ghulam Haider, carving a niche in the music industry.

However, the most emphatic entry was made by Lata Mangeshkar, whose voice was initially rejected for its shrillness but who later left her competition far behind and

has been the voice of several generations of heroines spanning six decades.

Manohar Iyer of Keep Alive, which is dedicated to compilation and creating awareness about vintage music, asserts that every decade since the 1930s had a revolutionary new offering.

'The 30s gave us sound, 40s brought peppiness and flamboyance. In the 50s, while everyone was at his or her creative peak with a variety of styles coming into play and making their mark, the purely classical and club songs made their entry.

'The 60s and 70s were marked by the spirit of freedom and hippie-psychedelic styles respectively. The 80s brought disco and 90s gave us Rahman's electronic sounds,' Iyer, whose organisation is commemorating 'Alam Ara's' arrival, said.

Today, according to industry insiders, Bollywood film music is worth anywhere between Rs.7-10 billion (\$157.3-224.7 million), although an exact estimate is difficult due to the rampant piracy.

Vinod Bhanushali, vice president (Marketing) of T-Series, a leading record company, said: 'People are in awe of film stars and as long as that is in place film music will have a place in the public mind.

'I can see the trade grow by leaps and bounds in the immediate future.'

Purists like Naushad believe it is the roots of the country that is keeping alive film music: 'Music is Shiva's gift to mankind. As long as the Ramayana and the Gita exist, music will exist.'

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