

Richa Sharma sings Bollywood's longest song!

In Ravi Chopra's 'Baabul' Richa Sharma has crooned the bidaai song in an unending flow of heart-breaking emotions, for a full 15 minutes without any orchestral embellishments. Unfortunately, only a small portion of it was included in the album.

'In fact my composer Aadesh Shrivastava had put one traditional instrument. I had to request him to take it out. It was hampering my flow of musical thoughts,' said Richa, whose voice soars across the crooning kingdom in meteoric manoeuvres.

Listen to her do the bidaai song in 'Baabul' or the bitiya song in 'Umrao Jaan' or go back to the title song of 'Baghban' and of course the 'Kahin aag lage' song in 'Taal', Richa's voice rips a hole in listeners' souls.

'It's funny you say that, because I've been singing since the age of eight.

That's when I did my first religious songs. I still continue to do that.

They're my heartbeat,' Richa told IANS.

At one time she wasn't hopeful that she would make a career in film singing.

'Now, of course, I'm doing a lot of film songs. I never thought I'd be singing in films. I just didn't have the heroine's voice. I thought I'd continue to sing that stray religious songs or bhikhari (beggar) song that needed a philosophical rendering in a rangy throat. That's me. Fortunately, A.R. Rahman's 'Kahin aag lage' in 'Taal' was picturised on Aishwarya Rai.'

Nonetheless, Richa's ravishing range remains restricted to rangy theme songs. Heroine's voices have so far been associated with one kind of singing. And that's the Lata Mangeshkar role model.

Singers who have emulated her style have always reaped the maximum benefits in the recording room. Those like Alisha Chinai, Jaspinder Nirula and Richa, who have gone against the grain, have been put in the fringes.

To Richa's relief and joy things are slowly changing.

'And I've one amazing singer, Sunidhi Chauhan, to thank for this. How I adore that girl's voice! Her deviant voice makes me hopeful about the future for another kind of voices.'

What both thrills excites and intrigues Richa is the fact that composers seem to give her a lot of elbowroom to improvise.

'It's rather gratifying but also scary. Aadesh always gave me room to innovate tremendously. For the 'Baabul' song he gave me only one brief. He gave me the words 'Babul mora naihar chutal jaye'. And he just asked me to sing.

'I sang for 15-16 minutes without any musical accompaniment. Of these only two-three minutes have been retained in the soundtrack for the lack of space, I guess.'

One can hear Richa's looming regret at her luminous labours being edited so drastically.

'I've also sung the other number 'Kehta hai baabul', which Jagjit Singh and Amitabh Bachchan have rendered in 'Baabul'. My version has been kept out of the album.'

But Richa isn't complaining.

'I won't say I'm satisfied with my career in film singing. But I'm happy. Whenever I go to a music director, there's a certain look of respect in his eyes. I cherish that above anything else.

'One of the high points in my career in films as a singer was when I was called by Sanjay Leela Bhansali after he heard me sing 'Mere maula', one of my favourite tracks, from 'Khakee'.

'Sanjay made my day when he said he was looking for me for a long time. I've sung a beautiful thumri for Monty Singh in 'Saawariya'. What a pleasure it is to sing for a filmmaker who knows what music is all about.'

Richa admits Bollywood hasn't really decided what to do with her unusually textured voice and stormy range.

'But I've a place, though that place is restricted by the fact that I'm not the heroine's voice. Nowadays, when I look at the kind of voices that are voted in the televised music contests, I wonder what we respect - talent or just the ability to ask for votes in a charming way.'

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