

Madan and melody

DEEPAK MAHAAN

CINEMA *Marrying talent with discipline and integrity, Madan Mohan, whose birth anniversary falls this Saturday, gave Hindi film music an important chapter.*

Deepak Mahaan



A CLASS APART Celebrated film music composer Madan Mohan (left) with his sister Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammad Rafi.

Music that wafts into the inner recesses of our soul is akin to gentle rain that falls slowly but improves the soil steadily. Just as droplets that quench the thirst of a parched earth also leave a sublime fragrance, refined music quietens the human mind with an indelible ‘audio print’. Radio enthusiasts insist Madan Mohan fulfils listeners' spiritual and sensual quest with his melodies that linger in the ears for years, and just as none can get over the proverbial taste of a mother's recipe, you never feel you've had enough of Madan Mohan's delectable songs.

Though he laid down his Army uniform for the harmonium, discipline and integrity remained his trademark virtues, ensuring no deviation from the path of excellence. A gentleman to the core, Madan Mohan's musical notes were as serene and sacred as the principles of fair play and justice that he practised within and outside his music room. One look at his films is enough to convince one that his music was a class apart, even when the films were not. “Aakhri Dao”, “Adalat”,

“Anpadh”, “Bank Manager”, “Dastak”, “Ghazal”, “Haqeeqat”, “Hanste Zakhm”, “Heer Ranjha”, “Jahaanara”, “Koshish”, “Laila Majnu”, “Mera Saaya”, “Neela Akash”, “Railway Platform” and many others leave you in no doubt of his gifted genius.

Popular music director Pyarelal says, “Irrespective of the banners, budgets or pressures, he created songs of rare feel drawing worldwide applause.” Critics who say his best came only with *rakhi* sister Lata Mangeshkar do him great injustice, as he has an equal number of melodious hits with Mohammed Rafi. The truth is that singers came as per the needs of his compositions, in consonance with the characters on screen and just one example will suffice to prove the point. Hear Asha Bhosle's all time best “Sabaa Se Ye Kahdo” (“Bank Manager”) and “Shokh Nazar Ki Bijaliyaan” (“Woh Kaun Thi”) from Madan's collection and you'll agree they equal the best of his solos with Lata!

However, what is inexplicable is why he wasn't conferred the top status as a music director or a major film award in his heyday when most of his 650 songs were hits and still continue to enthrall millions. Perhaps, what hindered his star rating was the commercial failure of many of his films, leading to an unfortunate impression that his music overshadowed the stories. His son Sanjeev Kohli, director, YashRaj Films, disagrees and opines, “The weaknesses lay with scripts and production values, though on several occasions, his music was the only motivation for audiences to see those films.”

Sanjeev is not wrong as Madan gems like Talat's “Main Paagal Mera Manwa Paagal” (“Aashiana”), Mukesh's “Bhulee Hui Yaadon” (“Sanjog”) and Lata's “Mujhe Yaad Karne Waale” (“Rishte Naate”) alone make us remember these flop films till this day. Of course, there were a number of hit films but these were too far and few. However, his versatility ensured astounding songs like “Main Ye Soch Kar” (“Haqeeqat”), “Mujhe Le Chalo” (“Sharabi”) or “Meri Duniya Mein Tum Aanyee” (“Heer Ranjha”) — perhaps the most sensuous yet hallowed song ever on earth — that are devoid of set rhythms yet create a tempo of their own. Why, even the ultimate patriotic song, “Ab Tumhare Hawaale Watan Saathiyon”, lacks a conventional beat or pace but is an all-time universal favourite!

Although he never had any formal training in music, Madan could still conjure or change a tune within minutes without jeopardising the melody or situation of the film. If his Lata masterpiece “Aap Ki Nazron Ne Samjha” was composed in 15 minutes at a recording studio, abandoning the original song, because Raja Mehndi Ali Khan came with a new poem, Madan created the Rafi evergreen “Ye Duniya Ye Mehfil” at midnight on telephone for his dear friend Chetan Anand. According to Ketan Anand, Chetan's son, “The two had fought and disagreed over an earlier tune. But when they both liked the new composition, they got so emotional that they met immediately after an hour and wept together till early hours of the morning!” Wonder of wonders, the song was recorded the same day!

However, this very sensitivity and sentimentality that inspired his muse, proved fatal in later life since the self-respecting artiste with a strong body had an extremely soft and tender heart. Just as he never took any help from his illustrious father Rai Bahadur Chunnilal, founder of Bombay Talkies, to establish himself, he never showed his deep hurt at being overlooked by major awards and film banners. Though he did get the National Award for “Dastak”, it was too late as he had by then taken to liquor to bury his wounds.

Till the last day, none could fault his punctuality and dedication to his art as he composed for “Mausam” and “Laila Majnu” which, paradoxically, proved great hits after his death. Who could know that his greatest success was still to come (see box)? It's a pity that he died in full bloom when his creativity was conquering the farthest frontiers of the musical universe!

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Divine Intervention

Sad but true, Madan Mohan received greater recognition after death than in his lifetime. His children, Sangeeta, Sanjeev and Sameer, who were quite young when he passed away, couldn't evaluate his outstanding ability. Though always aware of his popularity, the siblings say, “We understood our dad's work only after we grew up and heard film stalwarts proclaiming him as a genius.” This inspired the family to publish some of his unreleased compositions and when Yash Chopra picked up nine of his tunes for “Veer Zaara”, he asked Sanjeev to arrange the music as designed by Madan Mohan. Needless to say, “Veer Zaara” became a huge hit with music contributing to its success in a big way! Subsequently, YRF also released 15 previously recorded songs under its label “Kaise Kategi Zindagi”; its commercial success vindicating Madan Mohan as a virtuoso for all ages and seasons.