



P3 Ponjekars in festive mode



Mic testing with Kiara

P4

Sounds like film

While form and content play a significant role in films, sound is a vital aspect that evokes the theme and feel of the movie. National Award-winning sound designer Bishwadeep Chatterjee who was in Goa recently shares more with NT BUZZ

DANUSKA DA GAMA
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As a sound designer, sound editor and audio mixer Bishwadeep Chatterjee is responsible for everything that we hear while watching a film be it the mixing of the audio, the dialogue, music, folley sound, etcetera.

And over the last few years, he has worked on noted films like 'Madras Cafe' (2013), 'Bajirao Mastani' (2015), 'Uri: The Surgical Strike', and 'Children of the Soil' (2018), and won four National Awards for Best Audiography. Chatterjee has a Goa connect too having worked on the sound of Konkani films like 'K Sera Sera' and 'Nachom-ia Kumpasar'.

Excerpts from an interview
Q. When we watch a movie, the only sound we tend to pay attention to is the music and dialogues, or background score. What is your take on this?

People get mesmerised by the actor. That will always be the case. We are not the glamour portion of the film, but there is a lot going on in the background in terms of sound.

Q. How important is collaboration in filmmaking?

Working on a film is a team affair. It is a combination of various departments ie costume, cinematography, sound, editing, etcetera, coming together. But, it starts with the director who has to be focused and democratic. He needs a team to write the script, to ideate it and then go forward with the screenplay. When it comes to execution he needs a pair of eyes which is the cinematographer, and a pair of ears which is the sound engineer. So we become the eyes and ears

of the director. There has to be compatibility where sensibilities match. The actors take forward that vision.

Q. You personally take keen interest on your own to add value to a film through your work.

I like to be better informed and understand what the director wants so as to work according to what the script demands. Luckily, I have a comfort zone with almost all the directors. I try to put myself on the same page as the director and I do my bit of research - fact finding and collection for my soundtrack which is often liked by the director and thus the sound scale is worked out, which leads to less creative conflict.

Q. If you were offered a film that is made for space, and had to make sure that there is sound, what would you do?

When we work, we don't work on the literal sense, but it's our imagination and thought process that creates the work. So trying to get into the mind of the character travelling in space is important. I have to understand his life - he might probably be thinking of his family, so I might introduce his heartbeat. Or I might introduce a device or sound that allows him to talk. The film 'Gravity' used such audio effects. So it's basically a state of mind and imagination, and we use those liberties.

Q. While working on period films like 'Bajirao Mastani', 'Padmavat', etcetera, what aspects do you keep in mind?

While creating sound, we don't decide the success at that time, at least not in my department. It is all about having a story in mind and complementing it with sound. In a period



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Bajirao Mastani



Madras Cafe

"While creating sound, we don't decide the success at that time, at least not in my department. It is all about having a story in mind and complementing it with sound."

film that we have not lived through, it is left to our imagination on what that period will sound like, for example would there be horses, carts, or more birds? And where there is human civilisation, you can hear temples and chanting. While Bajirao was a Brahmin king, his ways were more like a Kshatriya. He killed, drank, and eventually married a Muslim. So I added the drama with the audio to bring out what actually happened.

Q. You introduced some Vedic chants for 'Bajirao Mastani' which was a treat to the ears.

I did my bit of research and read a book on 'Bajirao Mastani'. After the script came along, I decided to visit the Brahmins in Maharashtra to understand how a royal household would be like; would it be more spiritual and or more religious? Accordingly, I wanted to add these elements in the film. I attached myself to be-

ing relevant to the subject instead of taking away from the film, and thus it added texture to that story, making it more realistic. I recorded old ladies singing bhajans when I went to record the Vedic chants and that is what I was looking for the scene where Kashibai is showing the place to Bajirao. Sanjay Leela Bhansali was happy to hear it and it was a great feeling for me as well.

Q. You've won four National Awards so far. How memorable were these?

The first award was for 'Madras Café' which had a political backdrop. Having lived through that era and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, my job was again interesting. I had to work a lot on the sound, like deciding on what kind of helicopter was used. So I collected a good library of sounds which I used and tried to bring out the originality for the audience. And it got noticed. It was the first film to be

mixed with Dolby Atmos. Although, our deadline was preponed, I still took that risk and said that we need to do this as the film needed it. From creating the feeling of being ambushed in the forest, to how the intelligence committee functioned, it was a great opportunity and allowed me to explore. It was effective and very new to Bollywood.

Q. The buzz around 'Uri- The Surgical Strike' has still not died down.

When Aditya Dhar called me about making a film on the Uri attack I was in Kerala and had some free time. As I went through the script, I could hear the film, and began making my notes. We had to shoot in different circumstances, like in Serbia due to the sensitivity of the topic in India, but all this didn't deter Aditya in bringing out the result. He was particular about shooting it in a certain way that is very contemporary, very stylish. I feel

very privileged that I found myself working in that whole process. It was a challenge to design sound for it, as it was a more realistic space.

Q. How open-minded are filmmakers about sound design?

There are a lot of people interested in good product and everybody wants their film to shine. But, it also depends on how much say the director has. Sometimes the producer fixes the budget and the director cannot go beyond that. A person like me will agree to work with a director who has a good script, but I would be compromising if I decrease my price. There has to be proportionate budgeting for every department. Right now most of the money goes to the stars for the execution, but it is changing. Technically we are getting very sophisticated. And now with digital technology being used for both, audio and video, it is a battle and I will fight till the end to justify my work. But there are also other times like with Aditya Dhar who was working on his first film 'Uri', where we had budget constraints, but I agreed to take on the film even if it meant losing out on money because I had visualised it and I could not let Aditya down. We also enjoy working on regional films as this cinema gives one scope to come out and explore beyond.



Rajasthani dhamaka

Rajasthan-based Indo-Western fusion band 'Swaraag' was in Goa to perform recently. NT BUZZ learns more about the group who are regular visitors to the state

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Goa is no stranger to Swaraag, an Indo-Western fusion band, as the group has performed in the state a number of times.

Comprising of co-founder of the band, Arif Khan (zitar); Asif Khan (singer); Sajid Khan (drummer); Tasruf Ali (saxophone); Arif Khan (Rajasthani instruments such as khartal/morchang); Seif Ali Khan (tabla - mo) and Rey Rozerr (acoustic guitar), the band enjoys

performing Rajasthani folk traditional songs with a fusion touch, traditional Punjabi Sufi folk, Bollywood songs, apart from creating their own original Rajasthani and Hindi songs.

Indeed, it was in 2014 that the founder and team coach of the band, Pratap Singh and Arif Khan (zitar player) first met and began working with a small instrumental band. However, with time, the duo realised the need to include more instruments and vocals as well. "So we decided to include Asif who is the younger brother of Arif as he was fond of Sufi music. As we are from Rajasthan, we also added Rajasthani folk style. We then started to perform at weddings and corporate events," says Singh, adding that to increase their people connect, they then decided to include Bollywood numbers too. Gradually they also added one more lead instrument ie the saxophone and for that Rajasthani flavour, they got in the morchang/khartal.

Today, they perform for all kinds of occasions, be it birthdays, college fests, baby showers, etcetera and strive to appeal to people of all age groups. The group also keeps in mind certain aspects like the audience background, venue, and occasion and based on this, they decide on the song choices. In fact

'Padharo Mhare Desh' is their signature song.

"We do not use electric instruments like keyboard or sampler, we play purely acoustic and people really love it. Whatever song they demand we just fuse them with our instruments. People get mesmerised when they see the programme flow in between Rajasthani, Sufi and Bollywood fusion," says Singh.

Singh adds that a music performance is "an energy exchange programme" between the artists and the audience.

"When we play Sufi, sometimes people get goosebumps and some even start to weep. We connect people with their emotions," he adds.

Since their inception the group has done more than 1000 performance worldwide. "While performing, the band scans the audience to know what they like as they can't understand lyrics but they understand rhythm. So it's not difficult to attract people be it Indians or people abroad. For Indians we have multiple Indian flavours and for foreigners we have more instrument based compositions. Our zitar player also engages with them during the performance to check how much they are musically in rhythm and if people really like it," says Singh.