

INFLUENCE OF JAZZ ON BOLLYWOOD CINEMA

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Abstract

The cultural diversity of India is well known for its ancient musical tradition that every Indian is grown up with. This highly enriched country is hallowed with a captivating and enthralling tradition that entices people from across the world and is known for all its varied musical forms. Since birth we are familiar with Indian music be it blaring from the radio, television or Bollywood cinema. Be it the Quawwali Sufi, Indi- pop, rock, Bhajans Hindustani classical, Carnatic, folk to borrowed and mixed beats of Bollywood. Etc. Due to globalisation Indian music has travelled across the global intermingling with music of the west. If our music has made an impact on the west vice versa we have fused theirs with ours. In today's world the purity of anything does not remain whole without it crossing borders. Debates always embark if we have become a pseudo-Western country or it has helped Indian music to stay tuned with other kinds of music. This paper will briefly study the impact of American jazz on Bollywood.

Key Words: Jazz, Cultural Diversity, Globalisation, Pseudo-Western, American Jazz.

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Among the Greeks, music as a way of forgetting was well known. In Euripides' *Medea*, the tragic heroine's nurse explains to the women of Corinth about the relevance of music to calm the nerves. Says the nurse:

“...When men invented song,
They had in mind decoration for festivals and banquets,
Pretty tunes.
Think how much better off
We would be if music, like a magic spell, could reverse
The bitter histories of our lives
Or cure human sorrow...”

The freedom of jazz

No other form of music tried and achieved this, ‘create songs to reverse the bitter histories of our lives’ then the music that originated in the Deep South of the American continent, created by the slave community, which in time came to be defined as blues and jazz.

There is a long and storied history how jazz came into being. Beside the use of folk musical instruments, and a free-flowing style, which defines modern jazz, the music it created was more of an expression of freedom rather than anything else. Like blues, and other genres of black music, like gospel, jazz too has its origin in the cotton fields of the Americas, where slaves, at their backbreaking work, invented songs and words, not just to keep them going but also to give them hope, and also to communicate among themselves, in a way that their white masters cannot recognise it.

Soon, these songs, these tunes, or these every ideas (music as opposed to speech) became an instrument of protest, a means of survival and a way to celebrate the difference of life. The white masters had their own songs, their classical pianos, their operas. So, the black slaves created their own music which would tell the stories of their woes, their hopes, their constant struggle for freedom and dignity.

Soon, other oppressed groups picked up the soul of jazz. Prisoners created their forms in prisons, and in the Roaring Twenties, women, fighting for rights, found in jazz a way of freedom hitherto denied to them.

In the beginning, after the impromptu music of the slaves found its way to city clubs, jazz thrived in predominantly black ghettos, in cities like New Orleans in the state of Louisiana, where predominantly black musicians started forming bands with exciting names like Eagle Band, Eureka Brass Band, Tuxedo Band, and so on. These musicians spoke about the woe of the community, their trials and their hopes, in ways and tunes, which was unheard before.

In the intervening years between the two world wars, when America became the land of plenty and cities started to grow, these small-town black musicians doing their songs found their spotlight in town halls and clubs, not just among the black audience, but audiences of all race. For, unlike the classical music, or the folk music of the time, jazz was about abandon, about freedom, about breaking free. It spoke to the new generation who wanted to dance, who wanted to break free from the rigid traditional mores, who wanted to express themselves in a language they were comfortable. The music broke barriers. It was jazz, more than anything else that built the bridge between black slaves and white masters.

Starting from Afro-American folk culture and vocal traditions, the spirituals song, sermons, blues, field hollers, work song, etc, jazz became the music of the men freed, and soon, it emerged as the turning point in American socio-cultural history. In the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, jazz combined the essence of American and European classical music with African and slave folk songs. These songs were played to a syncopated beat, and from this emerged ragtime, then Dixieland and later Big Band, what many believe to be the start of modern jazz. The West African influence is evident in terms of how the music was written and played. Polyrhythm, swing rhythm, and syncopation are all major examples, which are the integral part of jazz music.

Wilder Hobson, in his book, *American Jazz Music* (1939), defines Jazz as “a language and what it communicated depended upon what the listener knew about its form.” Thus, the young, and especially the women, who, for the first time in history, were allowed to go out and be themselves, found a kindred spirit in jazz. It spoke to them and their rebellion against the conventional society. So, in 1920s, we had the ‘flappers’, the women who decided to break away from the tradition. Their hemlines rose and their bodices dropped. They took up smoking as a means of answering for themselves, started wearing flappers, and had discussions on sex. And, they dance to the tune of the jazz players.

One of the popular forms of jazz is the live orchestra music, using instruments such as trumpet, saxophone, piano, trombone, clarinet, double bass and drums. Jazz lovers are

familiar to jazz-typical words like arrangement, arranger, axe, battle of the bands, big band, bottle neck, cornet, coda, chops, and so on. Over the years, jazz has found its momentum by the number of festivals held all over the world, bringing the music to the streets for revelry.

As the music spread, we have a huge list of musicians who enriched the genre with their geniuses. Art Tatum was blind and a pianist. Charles Mingus was one of most creative musician in the jazz scene. Art Blakey was the well-known American drummer. Dizzy Gillespie was the jazz trumpet player. Other people like John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington made jazz a respectable musical genre.

Another important name is Louis Armstrong, known as 'Pops' or 'Satchmo'. An incredible jazz trumpet player, Armstrong, who was from New Orleans, is said to have a major role in building up modern jazz.

There are others. Ornette Coleman is known for his ground breaking album *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. Musicians like Herbie Hancock, Bud Powell, Frank Sinatra, Earl Hanes, Hank Moley, Freddie Hubbard and others contributed to the legacy of jazz. The influence and love for jazz was so overwhelming that a young man in 1920s said, "I'd rather live five years as a lion then ten years as a goat."

The influence of the music was encompassing. For example, the leading figure of Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes (1902-1967), was mesmerised by jazz. He wrote poems about it and many a times read his poems against a jazz backdrop. Other poets who were influenced by the rhythm of jazz were Frank O'Hara, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens; and novelists like Philip Roth, J D Salinger and Norman Mailer. Like the musicians, writers, influenced by jazz, highlighted the issues of ethnicity and American problems.

However, everything was not such a smooth sail. As the music rattled the conservative white majority, they denounced this 'street music.' The white conservatives were horrified that young, white people should listen to music created by former slaves. For example, articles like 'Jazz Must Go', which was published in 1921 in the 'Ladies Home Journal', became common.

While over the years, the musical genre has outgrown the issue of race, yet the issues of colour played an important role in the development of jazz. In the beginning, before jazz entered the mainstream, it was, above all, was an expression for equality, an expression of freedom for all. It heralded a new era of hope.

Thus, encompassing all styles and variations, jazz, above all, was about freedom, about equality, about choices, about doing what one wants to do, irrespective of social mores.

Jazz in Bollywood

This sense of freedom and anarchy, which defines jazz, was once of the reason why Hindi cinema, which is open to influences of any sort, could not fully utilise this music

genre in Indian context. In the post-Independent years, the Indian society was deeply conservative, and as such, in movies, protagonists were encouraged to uphold the 'Indian values'. Jazz was not Indian. It did not respect narrow cultural confines. Thus, Indian musicians failed to bring home the essence of jazz into their work.

Yet, an important part of the world music, jazz could not be ignored as well, especially when the Anglo-Indian communities in the country had picked up the genre as their own. Thus, we see the influence of jazz in Bollywood film music, even when the influence was not played to full satisfaction.

In 2007, I had seen Ramu Ramanathan's play 'Jazz' at the Prithvi theatre in Mumbai and the sound of the saxophone played by a young musician still resonates in my soul. It is like the music of the gods, energetic and electrifying. The music has its own independence and expression. For anyone who listens to jazz, there should be no prospect and no interruptions. Meeting up with the playwright, I asked him, what had motivated him to write the play?

Lost in thought, he said, "On a Friday morning in school, St Stanislaw's in Bandra, we had first Friday mass at St Peter's Church. We sat around listening to music, or maybe we didn't. It was boring school plus church. At that time, we did not know that the organ was belting out top classics. So, we would shuffle in our seats. It is many years later I realised that music was central to my schooling, this while listening to records from a friend's personal collection. In a way, you realise the church is place where you still can listen to music in the old-fashioned way. Today, with music being heard on the move, on your headphones, this community sharing of music is fading away. In a way, writing Jazz was all about reconnecting with music from my school days. The research gave me the opportunity to shamelessly relive the good old days. I met Denzil Smith and Naresh Fernandes eleven years ago. Both Bandra boys introduced me to the fact that jazz and bebop and cha cha was popular and the idols of Bollywood deployed a medley of traditional jazz in film songs. The main thing is, they answered a lot of my non-musical queries, plus introduced me to innumerable musicians. Writing Jazz was easy, since it was a special salute to the Bandra I knew. Today, as time sweeps by, nothing of that music survives, although sometimes, as I walk past my old alma mater in the bylanes, I hear a trumpeter bellowing out a shrill B. That is when I stop and listen to the music. 'Cause it is jazz."

The Indian cultural diversity is known for its traditional music, which has its own exclusivity, as other countries have theirs. Our music has been developing and altering over the years, from classical, traditional tunes to westernised contemporary themes. In India, music is a form of communication, especially where many languages are spoken. India has great access to music. Since birth, we familiarise with music through the radio, the television and the Bollywood films. We are privy to all the different forms of musical

genres, from qawalis, bhajans, ghazals, to Hindustani and Carantic classical, folk music, chants, pop, rock and all that jazz.

As result of globalisation, Indian music has travelled across the seven seas, intermingling with western music. In the West, India is known for its romantic Bollywood films, which are charged with music and dance, and this has, over the years, impacted the works of western musicians. To cite a few examples, we had the band Corner shop in 1990, which played their tribute to Asha Bhoslein 'Brimful of Asha'. The Asian Dub Foundation in 1990 diversified their Indian roots with electronic a rap, dancehall and punk influences. Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann was influenced by Bollywood during his production of *Moulin Rouge*. The band Les Rita Mitsouko used Bollywood effects in the music video for 'Le Petit Train'. In Britain, Indian music is heard at bars and restaurants. American pop sensation Britney Spears' song 'Addictive' samples a song sung by Lata Mangeshkar in 1981 film *Jyoti*. Sri Lankan-British singer M.I.A blends her music with different genres and is influenced by Indian music. Stevie Wonders and the Rolling Stone used Indian instruments in their compositions. Hindi music has been fused with the local styles in the Caribbean to form Chuntney music. The list can go on.

The same way, traditional Indian music has been influenced by the West. The flow of music and collaboration increased in a big way after Independence. Until then, there was an erratic sway towards western music. With the passage of time, jazz, rock-and-roll and disco genres entered Bollywood. The popularity of jazz penetrated on the Indian Bollywood music in the 1950s, with musicians like OP Nayyar, Naushad, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Shankar-Jaikishen, R D Burman, Anand-Milind, and Jatin-Lalit. Even AR Rehman, C Ramchandran, Salil Chowdhury, and Kishore Kumar were influenced by western music. As the orchestra became an admired mode of musical communication, many jazz instruments floated in the orchestra.

Warren Pinckney in the book *Jazz in India: Perspectives on Historical Development and Musical Acculturation* (1990), says, "The most successful periods in the history of jazz in India corresponds to the most successful periods of jazz history in the United States: the swing era of the 1930s and 1940s and the jazz rock fusion era today. Each in the history of jazz in India has produced outstanding musicians, from Chick Chocolate to Braz Gonsalves and from Louis Banks to Dinshah Sanjana."

Pianist Kersi introduced jazz to RD Burman, who said to have been a great improviser and blended with jazz well. Saxophonist late Manohari Singh was a part of Burman's band. In 1952, *Aan* was the first film to introduce western music, for which Naushad used a 100-piece orchestra. In the second half of the 1950s, many Goan musicians like Sebastian D'souza got with them jazz and rock-and-roll music. He made an entry into Bollywood playing in the OP Nayyar song 'Pritam Aan Milo' sung by CH Atma in

1955. D'souza also worked with Shankar-Jaikishen between 1952 and 1975 and did a non-film album 'Raga Jazz Style'.

Many of the jazz musicians in Bollywood were Roman Catholics from Goa, who joined hands with Bollywood though it did not do real justice to the original jazz music. Bollywood gave them money for the music they created. Jazz for many was a pathway for progress and modernisation. Louis Banks, one of the most popular jazz musicians in India, composed for Bollywood and when not doing so, he joined local bands to play jazz.

Naresh Fernandes, in his book *Taj Mahal Foxtrot: The Story of Bombay's Jazz Age* (2011) makes a reference to Franklin, who said, "Like Indian music, jazz cannot be written," and goes on to say, "You have to feel it. There are 12 bars, but each musician plays it differently. You play as you feel, morning you play different, evening you play different."

With the passage of time, dozens of Indian films would be enlivened by drums, trumpets, saxophones and so on. However, this loud, so called nonsensical music, did not agree with too many Indian audiences. Many felt the new music was not morally correct, especially for youngsters to dance together. In Mumbai's Willingdon Sports Club, some members complained the music did not allow them to concentrate on their card game. Many scorned the Indian woman who sipped cocktails, sported short hair, drawled, and wore cosmetics. They said the West was taking its toll on the traditional Indian woman.

Fernandes believes that because of the Hindi film industry, "Bombay always provided a living for many more jazz musicians than Calcutta ever did." The careers of trumpeters Chic Chocolate and Franz Ferdinand help prove Fernandes' point. Having played jazz at the Green's and Taj Mahal Hotel in the 1940s, they soon came to earn their stripes as composers and music conductors in the world of Bollywood."

Thus, despite complaints and criticism, jazz found its way to popular film music. It could not conquer the genre, true, but it had a sustained influence in Bollywood songs, especially songs that talked about modernity.

However, as it happens with Bollywood, every influence is moulded to fit into a pan-Indian cultural taste. Thus, while Bollywood took the influence of jazz, it turned it into something else, an essentially Indian music. While the original jazz has been about unadulterated emotions, about protest and about living the life of freedom and dignity, in the hands of Bollywood music directors, catering to a diverse audience looking for fun, turned jazz into a vessel of hedonism, which at once inspired fan following and criticism.

The song 'Mera Naam Chin Chin Choo' from the classic film *Howrah Bridge* (1958) is an early example of this kind of jazz influence. Here, the song has been used as a source of mild titillation, nothing more, nothing less.

Jazz is also seen in films like *Albela* (1951). The song, 'Shola Jo Bhadke, Dil Mera Dhadke', was composed in the new Latin American style, which was getting to be known as

rumba-samba. Chic Chocolate, known as the Indian Louis Armstrong, appeared in *Albela*, which made him a more noticeable Indian jazzman. Another song performed by Chic Chocolate was 'Gore GoreO Banke Chhore' from the film *Samadhi*. The 'Eena Meena Deeka' from the film *Aasha* (1957) too had elements of jazz.

Music directors like Shankar-Jaikishen and C Ramchandran's used Goan musician who were tuned to western music and therefore, their music had a strong jazz influence.

Fame for the studio musicians came about with the release of the film *AmarAkbarAntony*, where Laxmikant-Pyarelal gave one of the characters the name of his violin teacher and up sprung the song, 'My Name is Antony Gonsalves.' Gonsalves worked with Naushad, did arrangements for composers and had great interest in raga-based music. The popular song 'Sunday Ki Sunday' from the film *Shehnai* (1947) was a favourite for bands.

Predictably, the swing music of jazz caused a furore among the Indians, who felt westernisation was corrupting the system through its dance and music. Bollywood started showing lovers who went against arranged marriages, and in this case, jazz became their theme tune. Yet, mostly, jazz was represented to highlight instances, which were not 'traditional'.

Fernandes makes the observation: "Films often grafted a "cabaret scene" set in a nightclub, in which a vamp, a scantily clad woman (dressed only in balloons or in ostrich feathers or in a sequined gown with a daring slit) would shimmy to sax-studded band playing in the background, as the hero pondered evidence of moral laxity. The vamp's song often bristled with aphoristic allusions to the dangers of Indian values."

While influence of jazz thrived in the 40s and 50s, it was on the wane soon after and by 70s, when rock-and-roll and disco took over, jazz had but disappeared from the Bollywood scene.

It has heartening to notice, however, that in the recent time, young Bollywood filmmakers and musicians are turning their attention of jazz again. One of the important examples in this is Anurag Kashyap's film *Bombay Velvet* (2015), who has toyed with jazz in a big way. For Amit Trivedi, the music composer for the film, it was a difficult job since the film was all about jazz. Singer Sonu Nigam, who loves jazz, said it was a huge task to fuse jazz with Indian classical music, and therefore, jazz used in Bollywood cinema was basic. It has a big legacy and one needs plenty time to understand its shades. Since jazz was not for the masses, very few appreciated it, he added.

In the recent years, the influence over Jazz can be seen in films like *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobra* and *One by Two* by composer Shankar Mahadevan. We see the influences in songs like 'Aaj Din Gustakh Hai', 'Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na', 'Udi, Udi', 'Aise Na Dekho', and 'Zohara Jabeen'. 'Intehaa Ho Gayi' is another classic jazz song. The title soundtrack of the film

Karz has jazz influence. In a way, Bollywood was an indirect source, which introduced the jazz idiom to the Indian audience.

Fernandes quotes Soli Sorabjee in his book as saying that he was drawn to jazz because the greatest jazz performances and individuals solos have been created on the spur of the moment. "It is like an extempore speech in a debate. You have certain ideas and thoughts on the subject, melody, and when your turn comes, you develop themes as you go along," Sorabjee says in the book.

Jazz has survived in India and is still surviving, if not in Bollywood music. Sunil Sampat explains, "Jazz is a bit like a good book. You have to concentrate to get something out of it. This is why audiences and sponsors are sometimes hard to come by. It's almost intellectual really."

Thus, for a jazz aficionado, the musical form can never be dead. Yet, Bollywood film music, with its own limitations, cannot embrace the quality of jazz to its full extent. Yet, it cannot ignore the allure of jazz as well. So, we will continue to see the influence of jazz in Hindi film music one way or the other for a long time to come.

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