

# BOLLYWOOD

## Voices & Faces

### Voices, voices everywhere

The 'trademark voice' trend is more or less extinct – on one hand it makes us cherish the jewels we had and the reality it lent to the artists to give us a truly unique experience. On the other hand, it leaves us to broaden our horizons and listen to innumerable voices, some better and some not so but all the while giving us the satisfaction of experiencing something new. For some of us, no one but Udit Narayan can be Shahrukh Khan's true voice but it's good to know that we can be entertained just as much by Akon.

#### One actor, many voices

In the late 80s Udit Narayan and Kumar Sanu were the undefeated kings of playback while Alka Yagnik ruled the roost on the other side. With the exception of a few others like Kavita Krishnamoorthy, Sadhana Sargam, Abhijeet, Hariharan and Roop Kumar Rathod these singers enjoyed a long stint in the industry.

The late 90s saw new singers on the block like Sonu Nigam, Shaan, Shankar Mahadevan, KK and Sukhwinder Singh while the last decade has seen an explosion of new artists - Richa Sharma, Sunidhi Chauhan, Rekha Bharadwaj, Shafqat Amanat Ali, Vishal, Salim Merchant, Mohit Chauhan, Rahet Fateh Ali Khan, Alyssa Mendonsa (of Khwabon ke parindey fame) and many, many more.

#### One actor, one voice

Why was Mohammad Rafi the chosen playback singer for Shammi Kapoor or Kishore Kumar for Amitabh Bachchan? In the olden days, every singer was chosen for certain qualities in his or her voice that matched the actor's personality, their voice onscreen and even age, especially for male actors. This doesn't indicate that stalwarts like K. L. Saigal, Talat Mehmood, Manna Dey and Hemant Kumar were not great singers but just that a "Kishore-Khanna" or "Rafi-Shammi" pair clicked better onscreen.

This trend was not so rigid in the case of female actors like Madhubala, Nutan, Meena Kumari, Mumtaz, Sadhana, Waheeda Rahman and the later Jaya Bachchan, Hema Malini, Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi. The two reigning queens Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhonsle sang most of their songs but there were other luminaries such as Geeta Dutt and Suman Kalyanpur and before any of these there were Rajkumari, Shamshad Begum, Suraiya and Noorjehan.

Picture this: You are watching the evergreen classic *Mera joota hai japani* (Shree 420) featuring Raj Kapoor but instead of Mukesh, the playback singer turns out to be Kishore Kumar – a bit jarring?

Imagine the foot tapping *Baar baar dekho* (China Town) with Shammi Kapoor sung by Mukesh! Why do these combinations sound odd? Not because you've heard them in their original ones before but because right from the days of black and white, filmmakers and music directors established 'pairs' of actors and the voices that best suited them onscreen. It was these duos that worked so well on celluloid that they became the actor's trademark voice – Rajesh Khanna's songs were mostly sung by Kishore Kumar and Mukesh sang nearly every song of Raj Kapoor.

#### One actor, too many voices

Till the late 80s and even early 90s, the 'voices' of some actors were unmistakable – Udit Narayan sang for Amir Khan and then for Shahrukh Khan. (Darr, Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, Kuch Kuch Hota Hai – it's a fairly long list), but Khan's earlier films featured more Kumar Sanu songs like *Ye kaali kaali ankhen* (Baazigar), *Ae kaash ke hum* (Kabhi Haan Kabhi Na) and *Do dil* (Pardes).

Amitabh Bachchan, whose most songs were sung by Kishore, switched to Sudesh Bhonsle, Shabbir Kumar or Mohammad Aziz. Aziz also sang many songs for Anil Kapoor, Rishi Kapoor, Govinda and Mithun Chakraborty.

#### The question

Was it so important for an actor to have that one special voice?

Take the case of the immensely talented Mukesh – he started off by singing for Dilip Kumar and it was Rafi who sang for Raj Kapoor in *Andaz* but after *Madhumati*, Mukesh was approached to sing for Kapoor in *Barsaat* and *Awara* and with that started a fail-proof partnership that audiences loved. After this, it was Rafi who started giving playback for Kumar and there arose another match made in heaven.

The success of these professional relationships also spilled over into their personal lives, possibly a reason why they worked so well.

In fact, when Mukesh passed away, Raj Kapoor grieved, "I have lost my life. I am the body but Mukesh was my soul".

And what better example of a perfect match is there than Shammi Kapoor and Rafi? Rafi was famous for not only his extraordinary talent but also for his ability to modulate his voice according to the actor, who we all know couldn't stand in one place and sing. Rafi was so familiar with Shammi's onscreen antics that he would record his songs exactly the way Shammi would want it. When the famed artist passed away, Shammi said, "I am incomplete without Rafi".

However, Manna Dey, Hemant Kumar, Talat Aziz, Mahendra Kapoor, Yesudas, Shalendra and many others also gave their voices to all these actors at some or the other time. For instance, many songs of Rajesh Khanna that had a pure classical base were sung by Manna Dey, such as *Bhor ayi* (Bawarchi) and *Gori tori painjaniya* (Mere Mehboob). But sadly, only a few were counted as the actors' 'true voices'.

#### The flipside

Maybe no other actor has had as many different playback singers as Shahrukh Khan - Shafqat Amanat Ali (Mitwa), Udit Narayan, Kumar Sanu, Shankar Mahadevan (Pretty woman), Sonu Nigam (Kal ho na ho), Abhijeet (Mai koi aisa geet), Shaan (Mai hoon Don), Sukhwinder Singh (Chaiyya Chaiyya), Rabbi Shergill (Challa), KK (Ankhn me teri), Akon (Chamma Challo) and even himself in *Josh*.

While Nigam and Udit Narayan are possibly the best of the lot, one can't help but question a few other choices – Rabbi Shergill really doesn't cut it as Khan's voice and the very aim of Chamma Challo was to induce a fun quotient and not to match Khan's voice anyway.

Neither Bollywood nor the audience seem to mind that our actors sound different in every film or even in every song in the same film. But the flipside is that more artists now have a chance to break their way into the music industry and sing for a star so it's hard to find a fault with this new trend.