

# satish-botheyeswideopen

some topics need stereo vision

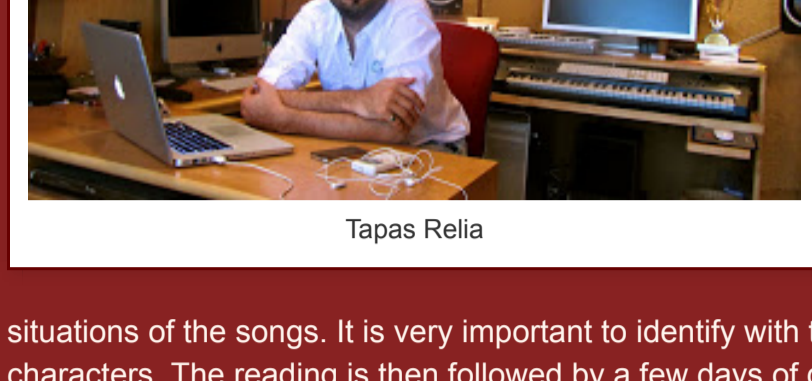
Monday, 27 February 2012

## Tapas Relia on Making of a Bollywood Song

You have heard his 'Kya Aap Close-Up Karte hain'. You have heard his 'Duniya Hila Denge' for Mumbai Indians. You have heard his Award winning scores for the cult status Hanuman series of Animation movies. Between giving high class Film music for Directors like Priyadarshan, Nagesh Kuknoor and Anurag Kashyap, Tapas Relia has scored the Music for TVCs of practically all the big brands you can think of. Unilever, Pepsi, Coke, Nike, Adidas, Lays, Polo, Cadbury, Dominos, McDonald's, Reliance.

Tapas exemplifies what I keep telling youngsters who ask for advice (without much success!) --- follow your passion, not your marks. Post school he dumped the beaten track and obtained a certificate in "Classical Piano" from The Trinity College Of Music London. He also studied "Composing For Film & Multimedia" & "Advanced Computer Music Synthesis & Composition" at the New York University, Manhattan. At 33, he is already a Dada of the Indian Ad Music world and you are sure to hear more about him in the future. Today he talks of Composing for Bollywood, giving lay readers a glimpse of what goes into the making of a song.---Satish Mutatkar

### Making of a Bollywood Song



Tapas Relia

Bollywood Songs are talked of as an integral part of India's Soft Power. Indians can hardly have a party, much less any formal celebration, without them. One question I am often asked is: How is a Bollywood Song made? I will take the opportunity of this Guest Post to answer that.

When I am asked to compose songs for a Bollywood film, the first thing I do is to read the script carefully. The director has already marked out the

situations of the songs. It is very important to identify with the whole premise of the story and the characters. The reading is then followed by a few days of discussions with the director and listening to references that he might have. A director almost always has references of songs or situations while he works on the script. Understanding these references is EXTREMELY important.

Once the situation and the references are clear, the composing begins. And by composing I mean the melody. Bare melody. This melody can take birth anywhere. Not necessarily when you actually sit down to make it. It can happen while you're driving, eating, gazing at the sky or interestingly, even while you're working on some other project or a different song! Inspiration can strike anywhere! I'm always dependent on my iPhone to quickly hum and record an idea before I forget. And that idea, again, can be anything. A simple melodic line, or a rhythm pattern, or a bass line or a chorus/hook line. It's quite overwhelming when you sit back and realize that the song you are now hearing has been born out of such a simple an idea.

Once you have a potentially strong idea, you begin work on it. The very very important work of turning that bare melody into a Song-ish form to present it to your director. A rough version of what would eventually be a full-fledged song. This, in my opinion, is the single most important step that decides the fate of the song.

I have always believed that the 'instrumentation' (what we normally call Arrangement or Production) of a song is as important as the melody. It can make or break the song. And a perfectly nice and suitable melody for that situation could be rejected by the director just because a rhythm pattern did not appeal to him! So I'm at my creative best when I'm semi-arranging my song for a presentation.

You begin by laying down instrument after instrument underneath the main melody, in your music making software. (Purists might cringe at the word Software, but that's how it is today) Drums, Bass, Guitars, Strings, Synths, Flutes and everything you can think of can be produced via a computer. But do note that these 'computer instruments' are mainly used for presentations and most are usually replaced by the real things in the final recordings.

Once you're ready with your rough demo in a dummy voice, you call in your director and play the song. Then you turn around and anxiously stare at him for a response. No matter how many times I do this, it always gives some exercise to resident butterflies in my stomach! I have been very fortunate in that usually the Directors approve; when they don't, that Melody goes into my Song Bank for some future use and it is back to the drawing board. Once the Director gives the nod, the technical processes of calling Instrumentalists, the Singers (hardly ever together) and so on to a professional Dubbing Studio for the final version and then the mixing, mastering etc. starts.

Do the lyrics come first or the melody? There are many different versions of the answer floating around. Let me confidently give you The Right One --- "Depends"! Really!

There are many composers, a majority in fact, who will hardly work on written lyrics first. They compose a melody by just humming or the usual La-La-La's or Na-Na-Na's, get it approved by the director, then send that off to the writer for the Humming-to-be replaced by Lyrics.

Then there are a few others, who prefer the orthodox way of composing the written word. I belong to this group. Give me a few good lines, and my creativity comes alive. But all Music Composers do sometimes need to get out of their comfort zone and compose without lyrics or vice-versa. For example, there might be a dialogue or a poem within the film's script which needs to be turned into a song. Or the song might be very very situational and the lyrics are meant to tell a story and propel the movie forward. At all times, the Song needs to do its job within the Framework of the film.

Is it true everything is done on a computer nowadays? Yes.

Computers are an integral part of the music industry today. We would be paralyzed without them. And this dependency is only going to get bigger in the future. I was fortunate enough to experience the analog old world charm before it completely vanished. Today, putting an idea down into a song form is literally a matter of hours and sometimes minutes. Computers have enabled us to go back and do changes on-the-fly at any point in the process. They have enabled us to collaborate with musicians from across the globe effortlessly. No longer do we have to wait for a particular artist to start a project. S/he can come in later at any point and record her/his parts.

I can make a scratch (in a dummy voice) song in my Home Studio in Mumbai, mail it to my director who's shooting in Mauritius, get his approval, send it to London for dubbing the singing if say our chosen singer Sonu Nigam happens to be there, and finally send it to LA for mixing and mastering, and re-send the final version back to my director for the shoot... all within 24 hours.

One of the most wonderful things that computers have done today is that they have made it possible for every budding composer without any solid financial backing to build his own affordable studio in a 10x10 room. All one needs today to make good music is a laptop. And THAT is truly amazing!

Are the live instrument players really out of work because of this? Not so. No matter how digital the world gets, we humans always yearn for the human touch. The same goes for the music today. Computer generated instrumental sounds are unbelievably close to the original but they can never replace the real thing. Live Music artists come at a premium. If you add up the cost of the artists and the studio time required to record them, it is way higher than using a computer instrument. But instrumentalists are definitely not out of work, and where budgets permit, every composer prefers to use live instruments. Pick up any CD from the last few years and read the credits. You will see a ton of live instrument players credited there. There are composers who have gone to such lengths as to fly abroad to record one exotic instrument, which they could have easily almost(!) recreated here using software.

It would not be fair to complete this post without giving you a concrete example. This is one of my favourites though not so well known since it was only in the Album of 'Hanuman' and was hardly used in the film. The brief was to create an unusual 'Devotional' song. I thought hard and wondered if a Sufi style Bhajan to be sung by two male singers would work well? It had never been attempted before to my knowledge. Once I got some wonderful lyrics, I composed a 'scratch' (rough) and sang it in my voice to give the Production team an idea. After their approval, my voice was duly replaced by the fantastic rendition of Shankar Mahadevan and Kailash Kher in the dubbing studio and the song came alive, simply divine! Here's a link to 'Dariya mein deepstamb...', enjoy:)

http://soundcloud.com/tapasrelia/02-jay-hanuman

Readers comments are always welcome and will usually be responded to in 48 hours.

Posted by Satish Mutatkar at 08:57. Recommend this on Google. Labels: Bollywood, Kailash Kher, Shankar Mahadevan, Tapas Relia

### 4 comments:

- Saru Singhal 28 February 2012 10:03 Thank you so much Sir for this post. I saw Sonu Nigam's interview few years back and he gave an account of how song is made but to listen it from composer's perspective is enlightening. I love the old way of making songs... Reply
- Amit 1 March 2012 06:49 Excellent post and wonderful song! Tapas, it would be great to hear your scratch version as well if you have it... --Amit Reply
- Kalyan sharma 3 April 2013 23:42 Sir, It was really great of u to share such secrets with us they really impressed me and also to concerned artist in happening. Thanks from bottom of my heart Kalyan sharma. Reply
- Prakash Somani 29 May 2013 21:13 Its really a grt knowledge addition when it comes to preparing for a song.. thnx. I to have around 50 poems written by me which i feel have a potential for conversion into a song.. Reply

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Satish Mutatkar English Hindi Writer, Lyricist, TV Commercial, TV Serial and Corporate film maker, Engineer, Manager, Sportsman and a thoroughly henpecked husband and father.. View my complete profile