

Topics that ranged from generations to generative AI

BY **PARAG KAMANI** · 12/09/2023



Since its inception in 2017, the Mumbai-based **All About Music** conference has largely filled the void in India's calendar of music industry events by engaging attendees through discussions focusing on innovations and advances by acting as the gateway to the Indian market for stake holders at home and for the larger global community.



Aishwarya Natarajan

While there were too many sessions to review, Sudeep Audio's *SAundCheck* focuses on some that it believes could make a major difference within the music world in the near future. For instance, on **day one**, there was a session for '**Lost genres – rediscovering folk, qawwali, devotional, and ghazal – nostalgia in Indian music**'. For starters, the panellists were in consensus by correctly calling the title of the session itself a misnomer, keeping in mind that each of these genres continue to exist now as they have done through the years, each having created a milieu all of their own.

Nevertheless, singer **Sudeep Banerji** spoke about his amazement at music labels who are without basic details on creators by providing an example of utilising the poetry of Kabir (who passed away in 1518 CE), but yet the musician was asked to obtain a no objection certificate from the lyricist for its usage. **Aishwarya Natarajan**, the founder of *Indianuance*, spoke about the genres under reference being considered “lost” merely because they were unfairly being placed in the same bucket – or while comparing market share – with Bollywood. Singer **Aabha Hanjura**, also the founder of *Ziply Productions*, spoke about contemporising the niche of folk music, and allowing it to gain mainstream acceptance as she provided the example of her latest effort, “Mere Makaan”.



Abha Hanjura

Of course, Abha remains an enigma of sorts, showcasing her unreleased songs live before releasing them. And, so it was with “Mere Makaan”, which she performed live in Mumbai on May 23rd at an event dubbed as “*Songs Of Home*” by ‘Aabha Hanjura Live featuring The Kashmiri Folk Ensemble’, as she ran through several songs, and concluded with “*Mere Makaan*”. This writer wrote a review following the show, stating that it provided “an emotion that had to be viewed in person to really comprehend as heartfelt, and honest...”

(sudeepaudio.com/saundcheck/aabha-hanjura-kashmiri-folk).

In premiering her song across various digital platforms on August 23rd, “Mere Makaan” is merely one example of the harrowing confessionals that Aabha conveys through her distinctive voice as her lyrics almost always lay the singer’s psyche, startlingly and sometimes uncomfortably bare, as she concludes “Mere Makaan” with multiple repetitions of the song title with ever changing tonality. In fact, Aabha’s confrontational openness makes it easy to overlook Aabha’s creative capabilities which go way beyond her vocals...as a composer-cum-lyricist.

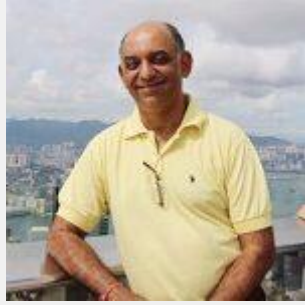
Primary partner in rhyme on this dramatic ballad that remains intimately confessional is the brilliancy of producer KJ Singh, who is also responsible for the song's sound engineering, mixing and mastering, and has been able to extract the best from the instrumentation too, predominantly the haunting piano arranged and played by Aman Mahajan and the evocative sound of cello by Jacob Charkey.



Narendra Kusnur

Similarly, the session on '**Transition In Tune – A&R's shifting role in music discovery**', effectively moderated by Hungama Digital Entertainment's **Soumini Sridhara Paul**, provided its own learnings about what really appears to be a "lost" art as presently it appears being salvaged only by the discovery of newer/younger artists through posts on social media. In all this, senior journalist **Narendra Kusnur** brought in his own perspective based on his innumerable first-hand experiences with artists, inevitably media hungry for publicity, with his inimitable humour.

Day two had marvellous topics of discussion too and, with **Atul Churamani**, managing director of *Turnkey Music & Publishing*, moderating the one on '**Creating the future – navigating the transitions in music publishing**', you could not go wrong.



Atul Churamani



Tubby

While each of the panellists detailed the corporates that they represented, Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) CEO **Rakesh Nigam** lamented about 300+ FM stations in India being on a path of non-cooperation in providing legitimate royalties towards the usage of content on radio. **Indi Chawla**, Head of international relations at The Mechanical Licensing Collective, spoke about her non-profit organization having its genesis courtesy the U.S. Copyright Office which, from January 2021 onwards, began administering royalties payable for streaming/downloads by digital service providers, and paying songwriters, composers, lyricists, and music publishers. **Anurag Rao**, founder of Chain Reactor, spoke about the ignorance of brands and advertisers regarding IPRS and, hence, how he quotes a lumpsum amount to clientele and, following receipt of payment, his organisation directly pays IPRS (on their behalf). **Indrajit 'Tubby' Sharma**, general secretary of Music Composers Association of India (MCAI), discussed how his organisation was working for cue sheets to be prepared for advertising agencies so that jingle creators could be paid royalties.



Nanni Singh

Proceedings for day two also had a fabulous session entitled '**Harmony for all – SOPs for a harmonious working environment**' by anchor Gitikka Ganju with ShowCase Events CEO **Nanni Singh** who, in representing the Event and Entertainment Management Association (EEMA) Artists Committee, spoke about proposed guidelines on uniting the thoughts of the artist, artist manager, and event manager for a better joint experience.

On the same day, Advocate **Priyanka Khimani** had a session on '**Copyright, Publishing & Contracts**' where, in announcing that she was not going to repeat presentations utilised during previous conferences, Priyanka focussed on providing examples of popular songs from the past being utilized in current Bollywood films, either from original soundtracks or as adaptations, supported by playing bytes of the original songs, but often unable to provide examples of the remakes as she, herself, had initiated take down notices across digital platforms as the rights for the renditions created were tainted.

Initially, Priyanka provided answers to queries but, as the learnings by the overflowing audience were comprehensively being understood by them, she opened the floor and had the packed attendees provide answers which, impressively, they managed correctly.



Priyanka Khimani

Priyanka Khimani re-appeared on **day three** also, in yet another invigorating session, this time on '**AI revolution in Indian music: augmenting creativity and industry growth**'. While most panellists spoke about what their respective organisation was initiating to support generative artificial intelligence, this writer absorbed its legal implications, having written about the topic for *SAundCheck* in a three-part series (sudeepaudio.com/saundcheck/who-owns-songs-created-by-ai-part1).

Further, Priyanka brought to the attention of the audience that artificial intelligence has always existed in some manner and, hence, she flagged off how contracts already make reference to the use of your “voice, image or likeness”, with or without using your name, for purposes deemed appropriate by the entity with whom you are signing. In addition, she also spoke about the possibility of greyness in instances when artists have passed away and their “voice, image or likeness” being utilised. Priyanka suggested that checks were required to protect, and prevent the infringement of, rights of intellectual property owners.

Across the three-day conference, co-curated by Atul Churamani, it was amazing to see the quantum of networking. As a staunch supporter of gender equality, congratulations to the organisers on having women deservedly featured prominently as speakers and/or as panellists.

Yet, not everything within the conference was appetising. The blandness of the cuisine was certainly one of them. Further, with no availability of seating outside the rooms hosting sessions, attendees had no choice but to visit the floor above for meetings, but were quickly and rudely interrupted by the venue's hotel security asking them to vacate their seating as it was purportedly an exclusive domain for house guests only. Then, there was the number of sessions of interest that overlapped each other as upto four rooms had discussions ongoing simultaneously. A little bit of scheduling would certainly have helped.

Nevertheless, these observations really should not take away from the tremendous effort by organisers **Create & Collab**, the IP Division of *TM Ventures*, that focuses on creating concepts within music and entertainment, in ensuring a full-house and by continuously supporting Connect Corner, an ideal platform for a one-on-one interaction between attendees and specialists in the music industry.

Nevertheless, while the take aways from **All About Music 2023** were manifold, it will certainly be a challenge to see how much of the announcements or, as the case is, pronouncements from the soothsayers present, either as speakers or as panellists, will turn into reality by next year's *All About Music...*

Parag Kamani