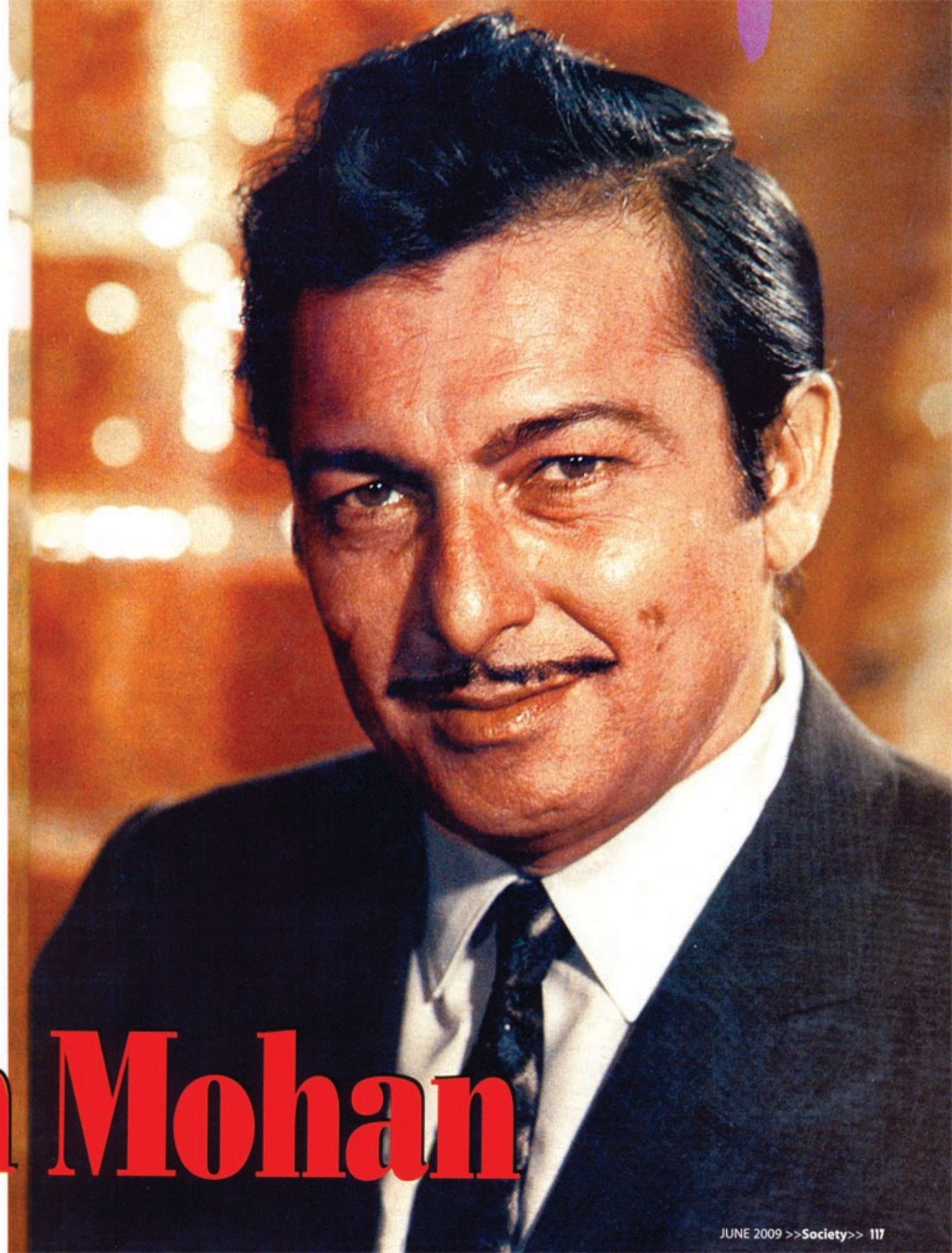




Madan Mohan's physical absence could never be felt because the legend's evergreen classics fill the gap and still rule the hearts of millions. His son, Sanjeev Kohli pulls the curtain off his illustrious father's career

In Harmony With **Madan Mohan**



BY HITEN TRIVEDI

TALK ABOUT MELODY in films and one cannot escape from mentioning about the legendary Madan Mohan. With hundreds of super hit songs to his credit, his name is still a synonym to romance. It's been 30 years since the melody king left us but his songs still woo millions of hearts and mesmerise even the youth. His son Sanjeev Kohli feels proud and honoured to share some interesting facts about his celebrated father's career. "It's wonderful that in today's time, when things have changed so much, especially in the field of music, people still remember and adore my father so much. My paternal grandfather, Raibahadur Chunnial, was a partner in Bombay Talkies and the Filmistan Studios, but not on the creative side. He used to take care of administration. So, people thought that my father would also continue my grandfather's legacy," tells Sanjeev.

However, Mohan was inclined towards becoming an actor, and later, a music director. "But my grandfather was a strict disciplinarian and always kept my father away from the

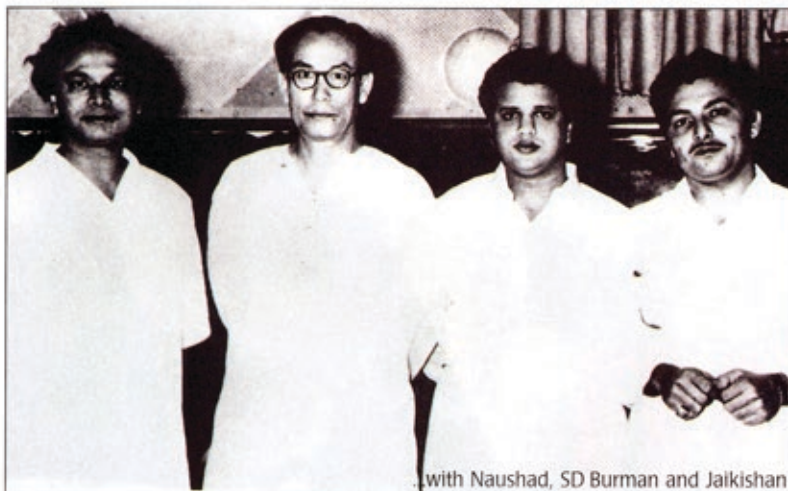
arch lights and cameras. He made my father join the Indian Army so that he can also be a disciplinarian. So, my father was in the Indian Army for two years and later eloped because he wanted to work in films. He even acted in a couple of films which unfortunately didn't do well at the box-office. He soon realised that music was his forte," avers Sanjeev.

The most interesting and unbelievable thing about Mohan is that he was not formally trained in music. "Most of the music directors of that time had a guru or *ustad* but he never had one. Nargisji's mother, Jaddanbai was my dad's neighbour and a very good classical singer in *thumri* and various other forms of

music. He used to listen to her and that's how he learnt music. He later worked as a violinist with the All India Radio in Lucknow and that's where he met Begum Akhtar who was considered the ghazal queen in those days. Although some of the films had western and rock-n-roll music, his forte was classical music and ghazals. A well-known producer and director Devendra Goyal,



...with Lata Mangeshkar



...with Naushad, SD Burman and Jaikishan

Mohd Rafi





along with my father and a new actor called Shekhar, formed a team and made a film titled *Aankhen*. The film flopped but the songs went on to become huge hits," he smiles.

With the presence of successful music directors like Naushad, C Ramchandra, SD Burman and Shankar Jaikishan, it was a tough task for Mohan to prove himself. "All these music directors had big banners in their kitty. Shankar Jaikishan had RK Films, SD Burman had Navketan Films and so on. So, my dad had to struggle a lot. He even got an opportunity to work as a music director in the Raj Kapoor and Nargis starrer *Aashiana*. But that film didn't do well. Till 1956, all the films in which he rendered music bombed at the box-office. Having said that, even though the films didn't do well his music still remained very popular. Then in 1956, the Ashok Kumar and Kishore Kumar starrer *Bhai Bhai* was released. The film was a huge hit and even the songs topped all the charts. I was born in 1956. So, my dad used to tell everybody that I brought him good luck."

The best songs composed by Mohan were with legendary Lata Mangeshkar and hence, she was known as his muse. Sanjeev excitedly shares an interesting story, "While composing for *Aankhen*, my dad wanted Lataji to sing for him. But she was very busy then and couldn't give him dates. However, when my dad got his second film, he went to Lataji and said, 'I would only compose a song in my life if you sing for me.' She then agreed and that's how they started working together and the rest is history." Prod him more about the then alleged affair between Lata Mangeshkar and Madan Mohan and Sanjeev comes very clear, "I really don't know why people talk such things about them because the fact remains that Lataji was my dad's *rakhi* sister. She used to tie him a *rakhi* and always addressed him as Madan *bhaiya*. Even

dad had utmost respect for her and would treat her like a sister. These rumours must have cropped up because they worked in many films together and gave some of the most melodious and memorable songs ever. But I take this opportunity to clarify to one and all that there wasn't any other relationship between Lataji and my father."

Sanjeev feels that the most unfortunate thing in his dad's career was that even though his music and songs were super hits, the films didn't do well. "Out of about 80 films in which he rendered music, hardly four or five films were commercially successful. So, even if people still remember his songs, they would not know the actors on whom his songs were picturised. He never got a Dilip Kumar starrer which was considered to be a matter of privilege then. He worked with Raj Kapoor in a couple of films which flopped. Even his short stint with Navketan Films proved unsuccessful. So he was very upset about the fact that he worked with lesser known and lesser successful stars throughout his career. But what kept him going was the respect and support that he got from the entire film fraternity."

Competition prevailed in those days too but his contemporaries used to appreciate and congratulate him for good work. "His colleagues remained with him through thick and thin. Other music directors used to look up to him and tell him that he was better than them. After *Anpadh* was released, Naushad *saab* said on record, 'The song *Aap ki nazron ne samjha pyaar ke kaabil mujhe* is better than any and every song that I have composed. Please give me this one song and take all my songs.' Also, after *Heer Ranjha* was released, SD Burman told my dad, 'I would have never been able to create such magical compositions. You have done a marvellous job.' This was the kind of camaraderie he shared with his fellow music directors. One of his most favourite films was *Jaban*