

# The creator of flawless gems

by SUBHASH K JHA

## The *Legends* collection aptly showcases the musical genius that was Madan Mohan

**W**OH bhudi dastaan lo phir yaad aa gayi. The man who virtually invented the film *ghazal* was an embodiment of myriad talents. This is proven by the versatility that's on display in the five-volume release, *Legends: Madan Mohan, The Unforgettable Composer*.

It's a myth that Madan Mohan could only compose *ghazals*. His love songs, *bhajans* and patriotic numbers have also withstood the test of time. And how! Today, Madan Mohan is no longer looked upon as just one of many gifted composers who entered the film industry in the 1950s.

His position is special, and it grows more special with every passing year. The songs that he composed for Mr Talat Mahmood (*Phir wohi sham*), Mohammed Rafi (*Tum jo mil gaye ho*), Mr Manna Dey (*Kaun aaya mere man ke dware*) and Ms Asha Bhosle (*Jhumka gira re*) were all extraordinarily special. Madan Mohan could compose songs by intuition. Tunes for the immortal Lata Mangeshkar numbers, *Aapki nazron ne samjha* and *Lag ja gale*, came almost in a flourish. And before we knew it, another Madan Mohan melody was born.

So special were Madan Mohan's compositions that singers tripped over one another to sing them. But his favourite was Ms Lata Mangeshkar. "Perhaps he felt I could give his compositions what they required," she told me recently in her guarded, won't-cause-hurt-to-anyone tone that she adopts whenever her undisputed supremacy is discussed.

It was more than just faith in her vocals. Madan Mohan selected Ms Mangeshkar to be his main voice because he knew only she could touch those heights of sublimity that his tunes strove to achieve through the seven musical notes. If you hear Madan Mohan sing *Mai ri, main kaase kahun peer* in *Dastak* in his own voice (his version was recorded prior to Ms Mangeshkar's since she didn't have the dates for the original recording), and then hear her take up the tune in her voice (we don't get this double-decker delight in the *Legends* pack, only Madan Mohan singing *Mai ri*), we know what the singer achieved in Madan Mohan's compositions.

She simply took hold of the composer's notes and whisked them away into wonderland. Don't take my word for it. Listen to the tunes in the *Legends* pack. Handpicked and lovingly re-mastered for optimum listening pleasure, Lata Mangeshkar-Madan Mohan's *Meri aankhon se koi. Woh chup rahen to, Zara si aahat, Tere bin sawan kaise beeta* and *Duniya bananewale, yehi hai meri iltija* have seldom sounded better. They represent the acme of creative excellence.

Ms Mangeshkar and her Madan Bhaiyya's creative collaboration left the rest of Mumbai's singing fraternity fuming with frustration. Mr Manna Dey was once quoted as saying that Madan Mohan was a very fine composer who never seemed to care for any other voice but that of Ms Mangeshkar.

Ms Asha Bhosle never got over her resentment. There was an incident when she walked up to the composer to ask why she wasn't being given an opportunity to sing his songs. "Nahin," the dapper ditty-maker replied. "Jab tak Lata hai, tab tak aur koi nahin."

Twenty-five years after his death, at a com-

memorative function for Madan Mohan, Ms Bhosle was emboldened to express her resentment regarding her status vis-à-vis her Didi and the composer.

Going up to stage to "express a few words", the outspoken singer made it known that her Didi wasn't the only one who got to sing the great Madan Mohan's compositions, that in fact she, Ms Bhosle, had sung the greatest hit of the composer's career, *Jhumka gira re*. Ms Mangeshkar, who was present at the function, hid her embar-

Ms Mangeshkar says how terrible she felt on her Madan Bhaiyya's behalf when he lost the Filmfare Award for *Woh Kaun Thi* by a slender margin. "You felt this way, and that's enough of a reward for me," Madan Mohan told his melodious muse quietly.

Isn't it funny to think that this man of melodious dimensions never got round to winning an award until 1971, when he won the National Award for *Dastak*? And *Mai ri*, what a knock-out score that was! Of the three Ms Mangeshkar solos, *Hum hain mata-e-kucha-o-bazar ki tarah*, *Baiyyan nadharo* and *Mai ri*, how does an anthologist, culling and harnessing the legendary proportions of Madan Mohan's genius, pick one or even two?

In *Legends*, we get Madan Mohan's own version of *Mai ri* while Ms Mangeshkar sings *Baiyyan na dharo*. Then there is Mohammed Rafi singing *Tumse kahun ek baat* for Sanjeev Kumar in



**Madan Mohan with Ms Lata Mangeshkar: made for each other**

passment and sorrow at this public display of familial envy under her dark glasses, which she was wearing after an eye operation.

But several noted guests present that evening were deeply affronted and embarrassed by Ms Bhosle's outburst. To deny Ms Mangeshkar's importance to Madan Mohan's oeuvre is to deny destiny and history. One can as much get away from the full-throated truth as one can from the five elements of Nature.

There is so much more to the Madan Mohan-Lata Mangeshkar combination than meets the eye. The sheer grit and glory of their collaboration defies common explanation. I am told there are scores of songs that he composed for his favourite voice, which were either never recorded or never released. For *Woh Kaun Thi*, we've heard only a fraction of the recorded music. But what a fabulous fraction!

*Dastak*. That too was quite unputdownable in its melodic overtures, though it doesn't figure in the *Legends* anthology.

Never in his 25-year long career did Madan Mohan compose a superfluous number. Every score, song, note and instrumentation had to be flawless. In a costume drama like *Jahan Ara*, we get gem after sparkling gem designed to create a mood of melodious infinity.

So impressed was Ms Mangeshkar's gifted composer-brother, Mr Hridaynath Mangeshkar, by Madan Mohan's compositions in *Jahan Ara* that he made the composer sign a copy of the film's album. Ironically, Madan Mohan's greatness was recognised posthumously. No sooner did he pass away on July 14, 1975, than his songs in Mr HS Rawail's *Laila Majnu* began to hit the high spot in the charts. *Husn hazir hai* remained at the top of the Cibaca Geet Mala for more than 25 weeks.

Madan Mohan wasn't around to witness his belated success. If he was, he would have smiled at the ways of destiny.