

Shankar Mahadevan: From a computer engineer to an acclaimed musician

The mustard seeds begin to sputter in the kadai, freshly cut vegetables and seasoning ingredients are added. The hand moves, tossing the ingredients in a rhythmic manner with the same élan with which it moves on the harmonium.

From salads to soups, paneer saljis to pastas, he is constantly in the kitchen throwing in ingredients to come up with dishes that become hits on the dining table. Shankar, the chef, enjoys making interesting dishes for his wife Sangeetha and sons Siddharth and Shivan, whenever he is at home in between his multifarious musical outings. This is another facet of this popular classicist, playback singer and music composer.

Shankar Mahadevan burst onto the musical arena with 'Breathless,' teaming up with poet-lyricist-writer Javed Akhtar. It went on to become one of the most iconic numbers. The collaborative album was commissioned by HMV and, Javed Akhtar's idea to have a song without a pause found resonance in Shankar and the two worked on this memorable album. No concert of Shankar is ever complete without this song. The album is gearing up for a twentieth year landmark in 2018. As he gets ready to celebrate this achievement, 2017 has also been a year when he has crossed many other milestones in his personal life, like completing 25 years of his marriage and 50 golden years of his life.

Many avatars

"Music is my friend, my constant companion," says Shankar, who in the past few decades has come up with chartbusters in various languages, performed classical and film music shows and judged and mentored youngsters in reality shows. A man of many avatars. How does he manage it?

He acknowledges the fact that his strong training in classical music under T.K. Balamani has been the pillar of his strength. "My Guru, a disciplinarian and a stickler for the traditional grammar, was also open-minded enough to allow her students to listen to different kinds of music. Her methodology was such that she would not teach me how to sing Kalyani, Arabhi or Mohanam ragas, but talk about how to structure, develop and embellish an alapana, whatever be the raga."

He continues, "She was one person who could have achieved great fame had she chosen to seek it. But she decided to raise a body of students who would bring glory to her." He speaks of his Guru's magic formula of teaching principles along with the



art of reading/learning by notation that steered him into a special place in the field of music.

It is quite common for the students to revere and love their guru. But T.K. Balamani had a special place in her heart for Shankar. In an earlier interview with her, she confided, "Naraiyaper Shankarai studenta koopita, aana avan avanaoda guru va marakavum ille, maatram ille." (Many gurus invited Shankar to be their student, but he neither forgot nor changed his guru).

Shankar Mahadevan wears his stardom lightly. He points out that his Guru continues to guide him even after she has left this world.

Few artistes reach the enviable place that Shankar has reached today but it is a rarity to see one with such affection and respect for fellow artistes. There is an honesty and open-mindedness about him that is so charming. It is also easy to get carried away by his sincerity. Any wonder that he draws a full house every time he goes up on stage.

When asked whether his training in classical music ever came in the way of his singing for films and other genres of music, he says, "The strong foundation has become a part of my system to such an extent that it has made me comfortable with any form of music. Besides training, you need to be focused and not shy away from hard work."

Three is company

As a film music composer, his association with Ehsaan Noorani and Loy Mendonsa has been another success story. The trio have managed to create music that strikes an instant chord with the listeners such as Mission Kashmir, Kal Ho Na Ho and Viswaroopam. Speaking about Viswaroopam, Shankar says, "We used a thumri in Tamil for the first time and it was an enjoyable experience. Collaborating with legends such as Pt. Birju Maharaj and Kamal Haasan were unforgettable moments."

When asked about their success formula? He says, "Reinventing ourselves constantly is the key to our longevity. We keep pushing the boundaries. We go through the whole process of creativity, disagreements and clash of ideas."

Of his team SEL (and they sell well as a brand), Shankar says, "We are all so different with our own likes and dislikes, yet the core commonality binds us. We are mature enough to respect differences and find our strengths to work on."

Speaking about the process of making music, he says, "It is a risk each time. Music is so abstract, it is a combination of words and melody. Is it going to appeal to listeners, is a constant question. So we keep looking for unchartered territories and move with the times. What is important is not to let mediocrity creep in."

Composing for films is on, but it is the private albums that have him excited. "I am working on an album with my two sons and in another one titled 'My Country My music,' I am singing with folk musicians." Would he like to do breathless again? Shankar says "No, that is done, I need to move on looking for fresh challenges."

THE FACT CORNER



A baby's body has about 300 bones at birth. These eventually fuse (grow together) to form the 206 bones that adults have



Out of 46,000 discovered species of spider, only a single one has been found to be a herbivore



The average adult human has two to nine pounds of bacteria in his or her body



Within three days of death, the enzymes that once digested your food begins to eat you

BRAIN TEASERS

1 Q. Divide 30 by 1/2 and add 10. What is the answer?

2 Q. A man builds a house rectangular in shape. All sides have southern exposure. A big bear walks by, what color is the bear? Why?

3 Q. If there are 3 apples and you take away 2, how many do you have?

4 Q. How many two cent stamps are there in a dozen?

5 Q. There's one sport in which neither the spectators nor the participants know the score or the leader until the contest ends. What is it?

6 Q. What famous North American landmark is constantly moving backward?

7 Q. What fruit has its seeds on the outside?

8 Q. Only four words in Standard English begin with the letters "dw". They are all common. Name two of them.

SOLUTIONS:
1. 70. 30 divided by 2 would have made 25. But 30 divided by 1/2 equals 60. Plus 10 equals 70.
2. White. Because a house with southern exposure is still 12.
3. You have two, because YOU took away 8. "Dwarf", "dwell", "divide", and "dweeb".
4. 12! A dozen of anything is still 12.
5. Boxing.
6. Niagara Falls.
7. Strawberry.
8. Dwarfs.
9. Bears.
10. North Pole, where they only have Polar Bears.
11. 50 exposures on all 4 sides must be at the top.

English Proverbs and Meanings

* A bad penny always turns up. An unwanted or disreputable person constantly comes back.

* A bad tree does not yield good apples. A bad parent does not raise good children.

* A bad workman blames his tools. Blaming the tools for bad workmanship is an excuse for lack of skill.

* A black plum is as sweet as a white. People should not be judged by their appearance.

* A broken friendship may be soldered but will never be sound.

Friendships can be rebuilt after a dispute but will never be as strong as before.

* A burden of one's own choice is not felt.

Something difficult seems easier when it is done voluntarily.

* A constant guest is never welcome.

If you come to visit too often, your host will be less pleased to see you.

Chilli Dosa



Ingredients needed
Thick spongy dosas -3
Cheese
Onion -2
Tomato -2
Green chilli - 1 finely chopped (optional)
Ginger - a small bit finely chopped
Capsicum - 1 medium
Red chilli powder - 3/4 -1 tsp
Turmeric powder -1/4 tsp
Kitchen king masala or garam masala powder - 1/4 tsp
Salt as required
Oil - 1/2 tbsp
Method
Heat oil, add onions, green chilli, ginger and saute till onions turn translucent.
Then add Cheese, tomatoes, chilli powder, turmeric powder and cook till tomatoes become mushy.
Now add capsicum, kitchen king masala and cook for a few more minutes.
Do not overcook the capsicum.
The capsicum should retain its crunchiness.
Add salt needed.
Now add the dosa bits and mix well till the dosa gets coated with the masala.
Serve warm and your child is going to enjoy it for sure.
Enjoy it with tomato ketchup.

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Rajma Sandwich



Ingredients needed
Brown bread - 6, Onion - 1
Ginger - 1/2 inch piece finely chopped
Green chilli - 1 finely chopped or chilli powder -1/2 tsp
Rajma /kidney beans - 1/2 cup cooked
Pepper powder to taste, Salt
Butter for toasting the bread
For the seasoning
Oil - 2 tsp, Cumin seeds - 3/4 tsp
Method -
Heat 2 tsp of oil, add cumin seeds, when it splutters, add finely chopped onions, green chillies, ginger and saute until onions turn transparent. If it is for kids, you can add 1/2 tsp chilli powder instead of green chillies.
Add the ground rajma, needed salt, pepper powder and mix it well.
How to prepare sandwich toast
Butter both sides of the bread, place 1-2 tbsp of the rajma filling and cover it with another buttered bread. Place it in a sandwich toaster and toast until golden brown. If you do not have a sandwich toaster, use a tawa to toast the bread. Cut diagonally and serve hot with tomato ketchup or tomato chutney.