

A wonderful Ghazal concert by Jagjit Singh

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An enchanting concert by the Legendary Ghazal singer Jagjit Singh was held in Sydney on 26 September 2009 at the Hillsong Convention Centre. He visited Australia several times in the past to entertain his innumerable fans of ghazals. After his successful concert in Sydney Opera House in 2005, Jagjit returned to Australia to perform ghazals in several capital cities, including Sydney and Melbourne.

A number of experienced and famous musicians accompanied Jagjit Singh in his tour of Australia. These musicians are great in their own right as performers of various musical instruments such as violin, tabla, flute and guitar. Among those accompanying him this time were Deepak Kumar Pandit (violin), Abhinav Upadhyay (tabla), Davendra Bhatt (flute) and Narendra Vasant Salaskar (guitar). Deepak Pandit is a very accomplished violinist and has performed violin for concerts of Anup Jalota, Ustad Zakir Hossain, Ustad Ghulam Ali, Hariharan and Lata Mangeshkar, not to speak of Jagjit Singh.

The concert at the Hillsong Convention Centre started at 7.30 in the evening and continued till 10.45 p.m. After the usual welcome addresses by a few dignitaries, including the organisers (Cine Star), Jagjit's team of instrumental musicians appeared on stage one by one. Finally, the Ghazal Maestro appeared and took his seat on stage receiving thunderous applause from the audience as expected.

Immediately after taking his seat on stage Jagjit Singh began performing his popular ghazals to the joy of the audience. The audience was enthralled with the beautiful, lively and intricate rendering of ghazals by the Ghazal Maestro. Some of the ghazals Jagjit performed included:

Sarakti Jaye Hai Rukh Se Naqab Ahista Ahista;
Baat Nicklegi To Phir Door Talak Jayegi;
Who Kagaz Ki Kashti, Wo Barish Ka Pani;
Tera Chehra Kitna Suhana Lagta Hai;
Hajaro Khahis Aysi, Ke Har Khahis Pe Dam Nickley;
Koi Fariad Hai; and
Chad Bhi Dekha, Phul Bhi Dekha.

Jagjit's performance at the Sydney concert was simply astonishing and awe-inspiring. His ghazals expressed a variety of mood in keeping with the underlying meanings of the lyric. One of my favourite ghazals Baat Nicklegi To Phir Door Talak Jayegi was so soulfully rendered by Jagjit that the audience appeared to have been immersed in a state of ecstasy tinged with a sombre feeling of delight.

Although Jagjit Singh did not appear to be engaged with the audience at the concert, on a few occasions he was making humour by referring to the meanings of words or phrases in the lyric of ghazals he performed. For example, in the ghazal Hajaro Khahis Aysi, there are a couple of verses depicting the story of Adam. We all know the story about Adam's expulsion from the heaven because he ate a forbidden fruit. While rendering this song, Jagjit made a fun out of it by saying that Adam made a

mess in the heaven (gar bar kor dia) by eating the forbidden fruit, and his comment generated loud laughter from members of the audience.

Jagjit has attained huge acclaim and admiration for his unique style of performing ghazals, be it modern or classical. He has also achieved tremendous commercial success through his albums, concerts and film songs. Perhaps no other ghazal singer in the Indian sub-continent has achieved so much in his or her lifetime, especially in terms of catering to tastes of modern ghazal lovers. He himself has become an institution in the domain of modern ghazals, so to speak.

In general, every successful artist has had to struggle in his or her early career and Jagjit is no exception to this. He went to Mumbai in 1965 to find a place in the world of music aspiring to be a successful singer. However, it took him quite a while to succeed. In his early years in Mumbai, he used to render jingles for advertisements and perform at private weddings and other parties to earn a living.

The big break Jagjit achieved in his music career was in 1976 when he released his album “the Unforgettable” along with his wife Chitra Singh. The album was very well received by the song lovers at that time. The sweet melody, wonderful tune and Jagjit’s soulful voice in the ghazals of the album were all captivating. In fact, this was the beginning of a new genre of ghazal rendering which brought the common people closer to ghazals. In the past, ghazals used to be appreciated only by an elite class who generally loved classical and semi-classical music rooted in the traditional music gharanas.

Jagjit has been innovative and has used many Western musical instruments in recording and rendering his ghazals. Some people have considered this as a heresy having an undesirable impact on the simplicity, integrity and purity of the traditional semi-classical genre of ghazals in the sub-continent.

Jagjit has made tremendous and lasting contribution to Indian music by making ghazals more melodic, poetic and enjoyable by a wider audience. His particular style of singing brings out the emotive feelings of ghazal and poetry lovers. In fact, his ghazals reflect a wonderful blend of tranquillity, serenity, softness, passion, grief, pain, depth and love. Having a God-gifted voice, Jagjit’s rendering of ghazals embody the pain and grief of an “ashiq” (lover) who has lost his beloved, the yearning a person possesses when away from home and the fear of loneliness in this transient life. His deep and soulful voice lays bare the immense and delicate emotion and feeling a person holds within his or her heart.

As a playback singer, Jagjit sang for a number of Bollywood films that included Arth, Saath Saath and Premgeet. Most of his film songs are still popular. One of his famous film songs “Ho To Se Chulo Tum, Mera Geet Amar Kar Do” has become a signature song for Jagjit. He has rendered this beautiful love song many times at his concerts all over the world.

Jagjit’s mesmerising ghazals have used excellent poetry by renowned poets like Javed Akhter, Gulzar, Ameer Meenai, Kafeel Aazer, Sudarshan Fakir, Nida Fazli, Kaifi Azmi and Mirza Ghalib. Good ghazals come out of good poetry and Jagjit’s ghazals

exemplify this. This was also evident in case of another great singer Talat Mahmood who sang so many beautiful non-film ghazals based on finest poetry (lyrics).

Can we forget Jagjit's ghazals in the TV serial "Mirza Ghalib" which was made in 1988? The life and times of this great Urdu poet in the Indian subcontinent was vividly portrayed in the serial produced by Gulzar and telecast on Indian TV channel Doordarshan. Jagjit Singh composed Ghalib's ghazals for the TV serial and the beautiful rendering of ghazals was reflected in his voice that elevated the meanings of the Ghalib's poetry to a higher and nobler dimension. Some of the philosophical underpinnings in Ghalib's poetry were transparent in Jagjit's composition of music in the TV serial. The famous film actor Nasiruddin Shah played the role of Mirza Ghalib in the serial. One of the Ghalib's ghazals composed by Jagjit was "Ye Na Thi Hamari Kismat, Ke Bisaal-e-Yaar Hota, Agar Aur Jeete Rahte, Wohi Intezar Hota" was very touching and brought out the emotive mood of an anguished lover waiting to meet with his beloved for ever.

Jagjit Singh's concert in Sydney was quite successful measured by a complete sell-out and his beautiful and mesmerising performance. The audience enjoyed his ghazal performance to their heart's contents. For me, it was an experience of a lifetime to be part of the audience at such a wonderful concert by a great Ghazal singer of all times.

"Jindegi Keya Hai Jan Ne Ke Liye, Jinda Rahna Bahut Jururi Hai
Aaj Tak Koi Bhi Raaha To Nahi".

(To know life, we need to live;
But nobody lives forever).

So how can we know life?

Abdul Quader writes from Canberra