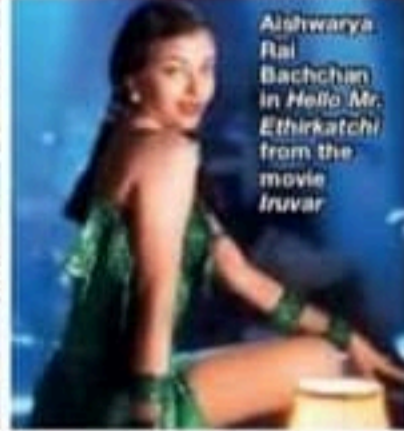


# Indian cinema and jazz: A love story

Jazz has been an integral part of Indian film music since the 1950s. With time, subtle influences have evolved into something more hardcore. On International Jazz Day, we take a look at what jazz has meant to film songs



A still from the song *Muskaanein Jhooti Hai* in the movie *Talaash*



Aishwarya Rai Bachchan in *Hello Mr. Ethiratchi* from the movie *Iruvar*



A still from the song *Kaisi Paheli Zindagi* in the movie *Parineeta*



**FOR THE LOVE OF JAZZ**  
This genre of music is very challenging and it takes a lot of character to stick with it. However, the most fun thing is that it is almost completely improvised. Though we can run the risk of not having a good evening, on good days, you can have everything in place. That is the gift of the craft  
— Amyt Dutta, guitarist

**Devika V Menon**  
Indian cinema embraced jazz early on. Songs in the 1950s – often referred to as the Golden Age of film music – had strains of woodwind instruments like the trombone, trumpet, saxophone and clarinet, apart from the piano, guitar and drums. RD Burman's music, for instance, was heavily influenced with the flavours of jazz, making it a genre that people knew and loved, says Shantanu Moitra.

But it wasn't just Bollywood films that made use of jazz in their music. It was sweeping through India's music scene, subtly and strongly. **"ILAIYARAJA BROUGHT JAZZ TO THE SOUTH"**  
As far as jazz guitarist Jagadeesh Mudambi Ramanujam is concerned, the jazz wave was pioneered by those like Ilaiyaraaja in the South. Ilaiyaraaja's classic, *Payanagal Mudi-vathilal*, has a Bossa Nova beat, which is a huge jazz influence, and he is instru-

mental in bringing jazz to South Indian films, despite being from a classical western background, shares Jagadeesh. "Ilaiyaraaja raised the music to a high level of complexity and it's difficult to play his songs," he adds. Vivek Santosh, a jazz pianist, speaks of how many musicians are doing a great job of applying jazz to film music. "The first film song I noticed it in was *Hello Mr Ethiratchi* from the movie, *Iruvar*. Sure, there were songs with influences, but this is hardcore jazz. Now, a lot of guys are trying to get that 100 per cent flavour," notes Vivek.



**'USHA UTHUP INTRODUCED ME TO JAZZ IN INDIA'**  
My introduction to jazz in India was Usha Uthup. I was at my uncle's house and I stumbled upon this record with the photo of a woman in a sari, but the music was totally alien to the cover. It was Usha Uthup's album of Jazz standards of Duke Wellington, Louis Armstrong and more. It is a genre that is very fresh and new. It also has so many instruments like the double bass and saxophone which you don't really see in our melodies.  
— Shantanu Moitra, music composer



- YOUR PLAYLIST FOR INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY**
- *Kaisi Paheli Zindagi* from *Parineeta* by Shantanu Moitra
  - *Muskaanein Jhooti* from *Talaash* by Ram Sampath
  - *Girls Like to Swing* from *Dil Dhudakne De* by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy
  - Songs from *Jubilee* by Amit Trivedi
  - Songs from *Bombay Velvet* by Amit Trivedi
  - *Yeh Mera Deewanapan Hai* from *The Namesake*

**'ADDS COLOUR AND GROOVE TO FILM MUSIC'**  
Tom Thomas has played jazz numbers for Telugu and Tamil films. He was associated with AR Rahman – from *Raja to Rohat*. "I remember playing 'swing jazz' for Raj Koti's song *He Papa Trinetrudu*. I played several songs for Keeravaani, like *Chiranjeevi's*



Usha Uthup



Jagadeesh Mudambi

**'I GREW UP LISTENING TO ILAIYARAJA'S MUSIC SINCE COLLEGE, AND I HAVE NOT COME ACROSS ANYONE ELSE WHO HAS COMPOSED MUSIC USING JAZZ HARMONIES AND RHYTHMS'**  
— Jagadeesh Mudambi Ramanujam, jazz guitarist



**'I WAS EXPOSED TO JAZZ AS A CHILD, EVEN THOUGH I DID NOT KNOW THE GENRE'**  
"It is a truly creative and open genre of music. The scope for interpretation and improvisation is endless. The creativity happens in the moment. Jazz always played in my home as my dad enjoyed it. Even though I didn't know the genre, I was exposed to it as a child. Jazz influences me like every other genre of music does.  
— Ehsaan Noorani, music composer

— With inputs by Neeshita Nyayapati, Paul Nicodemus, and Aastreyne Mohanta

## Jazz is winning hearts once again, age no bar

There has been a massive revival of jazz on the globe and its exception. As musicians get exposed to worldwide influences, the demographics of jazz lovers has changed in the country



MoonArra performing in Bengaluru



Desmadre Orchestra at the Jazz Weekender in Delhi in February

**Likhitha Prasanna**  
The rise of the hip-hop has overshadowed most genres in the country, but jazz is on an unexpected high. Earlier this month, Delhi hosted the third edition of the World Jazz Festival, featuring musicians from across the world, including the US, Thailand, Serbia, and South Korea. Apart from large events like the blues festival in Mumbai and the Jazz Weekender in Delhi held in February, most metro cities like Bengaluru and Kolkata have their own local jazz and blues gatherings.

"There has been a massive revival of jazz in the UK and worldwide," says Roshan Netaikar, festival director of Echoes of Earth, the green festival that toured three Indian cities with British Nu Jazz band Cinematic Orchestra.

"Cinematic Orchestra would not classify itself under pure jazz, but as a beautiful amalgamation of jazz and electronic music, and this is really the sound of Echoes," he says. Their 2022 lineup was also headlined by The Yusaf Dayes Experience, another popular jazz outfit from the UK, and its many variations clearly are making a foothold in India.



The Cinematic Orchestra headlined Echoes of Earth festival at Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru in April

**NOW, JAZZ IS HIGHLY POPULAR AMONG PEOPLE IN THEIR LATE 20S, AND VARIATIONS OF THE GENRE, LIKE NEO-SOUL, FOR EVEN YOUNGER FAN BASE**  
— Arati Rao-Shetty, entrepreneur and jazz enthusiast

**ROLE OF FUSION**  
Madhuri Jagadeesh, co-founder of MoonArra, a band that blends Indian classical, jazz, and world music, believes the experience of fusion between Indian elements has contributed to the

popularity of jazz. "In the 1940s and 50s, during the golden era of jazz, many international musicians used to frequent India. But this also kind of made it an elitist genre, restricting a mass audience from frequenting such events," she says. But she believes this has changed. "Now, there are many younger, serious musicians. Separatism – the idea that Indian classical music and western music are two ideas – has slowly dissipated. This, along with the exposure and interactions they have

with international artists, has made Indian music lovers more open to jazz and its various alterations," she says.

**THE SHIFT IN DEMOGRAPHIC**  
Arati Rao-Shetty, founder of one of Bengaluru's jazz hubs, has a first-hand observed this shift in demographics – a younger audience embracing jazz. "Around 10 to 12 years ago, India had a niche fan base for jazz. People knew of Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea, but jazz was limited to big clubs and cities. The audience was largely 45 and older. But over the past 11 years, this demographic shift – not just in Bengaluru, but also in cities like Calcutta, Delhi, and Mumbai. Now, jazz is highly popular among people in their late 20s, and variations of the genre, like neo-soul, have an even younger fan base – probably 18 or older," she says.

## World Jazz Festival unites global talents in Bengaluru

**GALLERY**

On April 28, Bengaluru hosted the World Jazz Festival, which featured artists from Germany, South Korea, and Serbia. Held at Chowdhry Memorial Hall, the third edition of the Festival in India started on April 20 and covers cities like Delhi, Pune, and Mumbai. This year's lineup had the Sven Rozier Quintet from South Korea featuring Lizzy Ossevoort and Baer Traa from the Netherlands, the Susanne Alt Band from Germany, and the Lucas Santana Quintet from Brazil.

Susanne Alt Band from Germany and (below) Lucas Santana Quintet from Brazil

Sven Rozier Quintet from South Korea featuring Lizzy Ossevoort and Baer Traa from the Netherlands performing at the festival