



Pakistan's pride

Leading 'classical-pop' singer of Pakistan Ustad Razaqat Ali Khan performs across the world winning accolades for the country. The son and nephew of legendary musical duo, Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali Khan, he appeals to the whole new generation with his mellifluous vocals that have the finesse of unadulterated classical. He has to his credit 11 albums. The 12th is in pipeline. Interestingly his classical albums can be brought from top music stores in London or New York but are rare to be seen in Pakistan. Here, however, the albums of semi-classical, Sufi, pop music and his Bollywood hits get rave reviews and are easily available.

Salamat Ali Khan and Nazakat Ali Khan

Popular singer Razaqat Ali Khan talks to EMANUEL SARFRAZ and RAO DILSHAD HUSSAIN about his singing career and achievements

were the most famous classical singers of Pakistan in the post independence time. Ali brothers were born in Sham Chaurasi in Hoshiarpur district of Punjab. They received rigorous classical training from their father Ustad Wilayat Ali Khan, the doyen of Sham Chaurasi gharana, and began giving concert at a very young age. They even gave



a radio concert from Lahore in 1942. Impressed by their singing, ruler of Champanagar state in Bihar made them his court musicians. Soon they lost their father and decided to migrate to Pakistan. Sham Chaurasi gharana is a very old dhrupad gharana going back nearly 500 years. Credit for bringing khayal singing to this gharana goes to Ali brothers. Deeply influenced by dhrupad, the khayal style they evolved had long alaap and great layakari. In that sense their khayal is very different from other long established khayal gharanas.

Rafqat is recipient of a number of awards. In 1986 in Lahore he received the Amir Khusro Award as the best young classical singer. In 1987, He has appeared on recordings from Nimbus (UK), EMI (India), HMV(UK), Water Lily



Acoustics(USA), Westron (India), MegaSound(India), Keytune Productiona (Holland), Plus Music(India) and Folk Heritage Pakistan.

Rafaqat has done his Masters in Political Science from Dyal Singh College, Lahore. He loved gymnastics and rose to become university and later national level champion. Rafaqat can play the tabla, dholak, harmonium, electric drum and synthesiser. He writes the lyrics of his songs and also composes them himself. He is equally at home singing Punjabi as well as songs in Urdu. Recognition came to Rafaqat early in life as he started performing at a very young age. Trained in the art of classical music by his elders, the young singer soon started appearing in TV and radio programmes. Inheritor of the rich legacy of classical music, Rafaqat lived up to the expectations of his elders by excelling in all the genres of music. The greatest thing about the singer is his humour and humility. He does not have the airs and graces. Fame never could make him a stiff neck.

“The gharana is over 400 years old. My father and uncle made a lot of contribution for the promotion of classical music. I sing in various different styles. I will continue to follow in their footsteps for all of my life,” a smiling Rafaqat said in an exclusive interview with the Sunday Plus.

“Classical music has been ignored here in Pakistan. Classical singers were not promoted by the art councils and other institutions meant for the purpose. The families associated with the classical music, however, continued with the centuries old tradition and did not allow it die. Pop music

was on the rise in Pakistan. Over the years there is renewal of interest in the classical and semi-classical music. The music that appeals to the majority of people today has elements of classical music,” he explained.

About his performances abroad the singer explained that he had been performing across the globe for more than two decades now. “I have performed in across India, UK, USA, UAE, Canada, Australia, Far East and many European countries. In March I was USA performing in East Coast cities like New York. Early this summer I will again be going back to Norway to record my album, which will be truly the rhythm of the soul and a treat for true music lovers,” Rafaqat maintained.

He said he was the first Pakistani singer to perform at the Opera House in Oslo, which was an honour for him. Rafaqat preformed at Opera continuously for three days last week. The event organised in Norway by the Multi Cultural Festival was also attended by the Queen of Norway Sonja Haraldsen. During his dazzling performance at Opera, he recited Pakistani and Bollywood songs. His singing of classical songs was highly appreciated by the audience and brought tears in the eyes of music lovers. He was accompanied by Bollywood Brass Band and Nafees Irfan and Jasvat Singh. Rafaqat Ali Khan also presented classical songs at inaugural ceremony of Festival at Rud House (City Hall) Oslo.

Besides the performance at the Opera in Oslo Rafaqat has sung in top music festivals of Europe and North America. His performances in top music halls across the globe are something that perhaps no other

musician or singer from South Asia has had the honour. Rafaqat open to diversity has also featured on the Rishi Rich album ‘The Project’. He says it was an experience that was totally different but very good. He has also sung tracks for the music genius Peter Gabriel.

About playback singing for Bollywood Rafaqat said there are not many musical events in Pakistan and the singers have to look for good opportunities. “Pakistani musicians and singers are highly talented. There are not many opportunities in the country for them to show their talent. Our music has always been soul stirring. When the Indian producers and directors listen to our music they are simply mesmerised at the quality. This is the main reason that they want to give opportunity to Pakistani artistes,” he said.

He lamented that artistes are not properly promoted in Pakistan. “Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan continued to sing here for a long time but was not given due recognition. Similarly Rahat Fateh Ali Khan was singing here for years but few recognised his talent or were ready to accept him as a great artiste. When Bollywood recognised their greatness the Pakistani promoters and channels too toed the same line. Now Rahat is a big star because his songs feature in many Indian movies. It is high time we give due recognition to our genuine artistes,” he said.

Rafaqat songs as a playback have been highly appreciated. He is flooded with offers but says he is very selective. “For me a good album is more important than a successful one. Similarly it is not important that I get a song in a big budget film. What is more

important are the lyrics and the music of that song,” he was of the view.

Rafaqat has to his credit many hit songs from the 11 albums. Some of these songs have proved to great hits when they were included in Bollywood movies. His playback hits include ‘Mein haun aasmaan’ from film ‘Krish’, ‘Maula meray maula’ from ‘Awarapan’, ‘Apnay dhoka detay hain’ from ‘Dhoka’ and ‘Raat katnay ko hai’ from ‘Silence please’. His other hit songs include ‘Allah tera shukriya’, ‘Kash hum bhi pharay likhay hotay’, ‘Chand sa chehra’, ‘Kahein yeh akhiyaan’, ‘Ishq da bukhaar’, ‘Ishq da warka’, ‘Duma dum’, ‘Allah janey’, ‘Tere Ishq Nachaya’, ‘Deewana Ban Gaya’ and ‘Agar Hum Tumhare’.

The song ‘Maula meray maula’ remained on top of the listeners chart in India for a long time. The soul stirring song was earlier sung by Rafaqat as ‘Tuma tuma’. The Mahesh and Makesh Bhatt were reportedly mesmerised to hear the song. The suggested that Rafaqat change some wording to make it more impressive. ‘Maula meray maula’ with Rafaqat’s grand taan is a memorable song.

The acclaimed singer is again in UK collaborating with different music bands. He is working on his new album, which would be the perfect example of his passionate ‘classical-pop’ style and would include sufi, classical and pop music. The album is expected to hit the stands this fall or early winter. Rafaqat has come a long way carrying on in the footsteps of his father and uncle. His fusion of different genres of music as well as innovations in pure classical will long be remembered. ●

