

Sister in symphony

Lata Mangeshkar writes on their relationship

Lata Mangeshkar got the shock of her life when she landed at the Santa Cruz airport on October 13. She had a nice time in Madras, recording a few Tamil songs and watching the nail-biting India-Australia Reliance Cup match. She was received at the airport by Shashank Lalchand, son of industrialist Lalchand Hirachand and owner of a recording studio.

"Kishoreda is no more, didi. We will go there direct," Shashank told Lata.

Lata was dumbfounded. Later she burst into tears when she saw the departed singer's body. She had to take sedatives to keep calm the next day.

In this article, Lata reminisces about Kishore Kumar with utmost warmth (as told to Shireesh Kanekar).

MY first meeting with Kishoreda was in 1947. One day, as usual, I got into the suburban train at Grant Road to go to Malad for some recording at Bombay Talkies. He boarded the train at Mahalaxmi. I noticed him as the train was not crowded. He was wearing pyjamas and Nehru jacket as it was popularly called those days. For some strange reasons he was carrying a stick in his hand. He was also having a scarf around his neck. To me he looked like a hoodlum. I got down at Malad. He also got down at the

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Attentive ever. Lata and Kishore with Dev Anand

same station. I saw him following me. I got into a tonga. He followed me in another tonga. I also noticed him following me to the Bombay Talkies. I told Guruji (composer Khemchand Prakash) about him. Guruji had a hearty laugh and told me: 'Lata, he is not a goonda. He is Ashok Kumar's younger brother. He is a good singer.'

Sapno ki nagari mein aaj kaun aaya was his first recorded song. Khemchand Prakash used to be extremely fond of him. I have seen Khemchandji teaching, goading and reprimanding him.

Kishore and I had quite a few things in common. Both of us were born in Madhya Pradesh. He in Khandwa and I in Indore. We were born in the same year, 1929. His birth-date was August 4 and mine is September 28. Both of us were ardent Saigal admirers. That was yet another common bond. Besides, both of us were fun-loving and relished

mimicry. Therefore we got along famously right from the beginning.

From my side, there were no misunderstandings with him. From his side, yes. People around him used to vitiate his mind. Being a simple soul he would easily believe them. He was led to believe that during our stage shows in the United States and Canada, I hogged all the publicity and he was sidelined. He talked to the press and made noise. I kept silent. He soon realised his mistake and wrote me a touching letter. He said, "since you regard me as an elder brother, you must understand that there was some misunderstanding. Please bear with me..." Thereafter when we met at the Hope '86 show in Calcutta, he made an unusual gesture towards me which I shall never forget. Backstage with so many people watching, he held my hand and said: "Have you forgotten everything?"

"Yes, Kishoreda."

"So no more misunderstanding in life."

"No, Kishoreda."

"I am your brother and you are my sister and nothing else matters."

"You said it Kishoreda."

I was in tears because I knew that he meant it. Even when I think of the incident, my eyes get filled with tears. Would any other person of his stature and standing have the heart to admit openly that he was wrong? He was a great artiste and a great human being. It is difficult to come across a person with a bigger heart.

He was versatile and inimitable. He was distinctly different from all the others. You see, Mukesh used to sing in Saigal style. Now we have singers singing in Mukesh style. Mohammad Rafi has so many imitators, though frankly speaking, none of them comes anywhere near Rafisaab. There are half a dozen singers in Bengal who ape Hemant Kumar. But you don't have a Kishore sing-alike. You are not likely to have one either. He was inimitable in the literal sense of the word. Maybe, his son Amit will come somewhat close to him.

As a singer, he was intuitively *sureela*. If at all he was going wrong, he would instantly realise it and would be in tune in no time. The ease with which he sang was remarkable. I often used to tell him that I would never be able to sing with his ease. Be it a comedy song or a serious one, he was equally good. Take his sad numbers from *Jagamag jagamag in Him Jhim to Zindagi ka safar* in *Safar*. The pathos in his voice touches the heart. He meticulously avoided sobbing in sad songs as was the practice those days. His comic songs

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like *Charandasko pineki jo adat na hoti* or *My name is Anthony* or *Kismat ki baat hai* were devoid of gimmicks. He used to sing them with rare verve, fun and timing. Being a comedian himself, he knew how a funny song should be rendered. I really admired and told him so, the way he had given that paan-chewing effect in *Khaike paan banaraswalla* in *Don*.

Offhand, I may not be able to recall all the Kishoreda songs I love, but I can give a few. I like his songs from *Amar Prem*, *Kati Patang*, *New Delhi*, *Munimji*, *Paying Guest*, *Safar*, *Pyar ka Mausam*. There are many more, of course.

He had the ingredients that make a

sing a duet which both Lata and I hate." My heart missed a beat. I didn't know where to look. Then he announced the song *Shayad mere shadika khayal from Sauten*. It was hilarious. I couldn't stop laughing even while singing the song. Then at another place he announced a duet from *Guide—Gata rahe mera dil—* thus: "This duet was rendered on the screen by Swami Dada Dev Anand and 'Dahiwada' Rehman, sorry I mean Waheeda Rehman."

Of late, he would often talk about death. He was a sad man at heart. Recently he told me that all this dancing and singing and buffoonery were



Perfect harmony. Kishore and Lata at Hope '86 show

perfect artiste. Heaps of talent, bundle of contradictions, bouts of moods. I will tell you about an incident he told me about. He said to me: "Lata, once I was shooting outdoor. I was sitting in my car waiting for the shot to be ready. I saw people passing by, enjoying the lovely evening. I said to myself, Kishore what the hell are you doing here. Go home and enjoy." So I started the car and went home." That was Kishoreda. People called him eccentric, mad and what not. He did not have the sophistication, the knack or the inclination to wriggle out of an awkward situation skilfully. He would invariably take shelter behind this carefully developed mask of a buffoon. That was his defence mechanism. However, this earned him a bad name but he didn't give a damn.

During one of the stage shows in the United States, he announced over the mike that at times "we singers have to sing songs we don't like. Now we will

only a front to hide the sadness. Isn't it an irony that an artiste like him loved by the millions should be so sad and lonely? We had planned to sing Saigal's duets. That would have been our joint tribute to the great singer both of us loved so much. We had also decided to spend more time together as we had both agreed that there is nothing more important in life than love and affection.

When I was in London on *Rakshabandhan* day, he flew down from Holland to get the *raakhi* tied by me. I had prepared *sheera* for him. I also took him to his favourite restaurant in London. And there, to everyone's astonishment, he played a tape of songs he used to imitate and make us laugh in the good old days. When I asked him from where he had managed to get these old, rare songs, he said in mock anger: "What the hell you mean, Lata? I got them for you." Oh God, how much I am going to miss him!