



ANNUAL REPORT 2024









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I'd like to pay my homage, on behalf of the entire industry, to the artists that we've lost this year.

Shri Pankaj Udhas ji, Shri Bhavatharini Raja ji, Utsad Rashid Khan sahab, Uma Ramanan ji, Pandit Rajeev Taranath ji, Dr. Prabha Atre ji, Ashima Mukherjee ji, Naeem Sayyed ji, Thanga Darlong ji, Anup Ghoshal ji, Sajid Khan sir, O.S. Thyagarajan ji and Bhavani Shankar ji.

Looking back at the two years of Covid, the entire music industry went through a tough time. But as our parents used to say, whenever something bad happens, there's always a silver lining at the end of the tunnel. And that's what happened with people being forced to stay at home during this period. It created an absolutely new generation of users.

Many of the younger people were at the forefront of usage of digital platforms. But the people in their 50s and 60s and 70s just did not use digital platforms. The two years of COVID, when they were stuck at home, with their children and grandchildren forced them to start adopting the new digital media technology. Which means that suddenly music consumption by the older age group is booming across all media platforms.

It has also generated an absolutely new world of creators. We are now in a very happy position where non-film music is buzzing in our country, and many more people are coming out and making a mark for themselves independent of being associated with film music.

But there's one thing we all, every CEO of every music label, every big artist, every major platform in this country agrees on -₹3,000 crores - the size of the Indian music industry is abysmally small for a country that has a population of 1.4 billion . Please add all the neighbouring countries that also listen to the music generated in

India. The market revenue numbers in India are very, very small. I think we can make far more money. Also keep in mind, there are 750 million people right now with smartphones. Around 20-30 million connected televisions today are streaming content.

But to earn more, it's very important that all stakeholders come together. Artistes who are the Creators, Music Labels who are the Financial Investors and Platforms who are the Revenue Generators

Over the last few years, with the efforts of Javed Sahab, Anup Jalota ji and industry leaders like Devraj Sanyal and Mandar Thakur, we have been able to resolve a majority of the issues that have plaqued the industry.

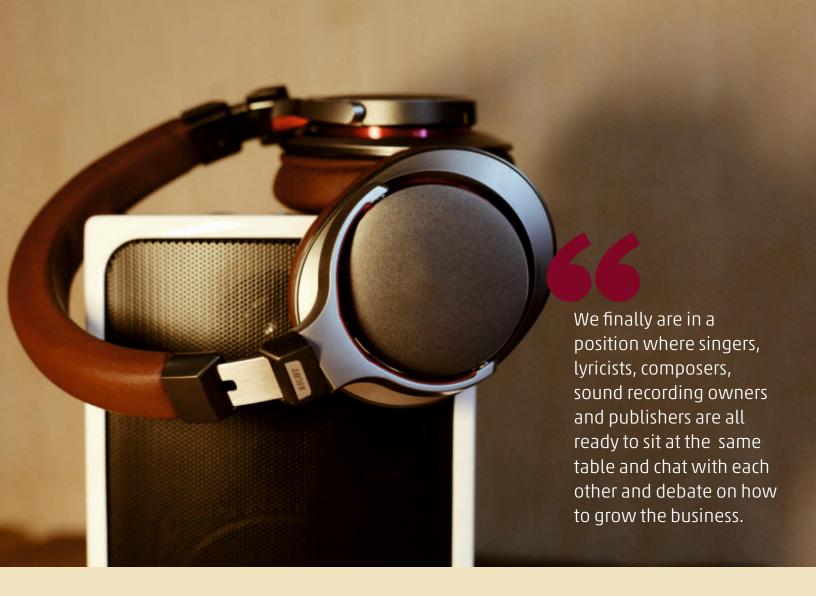
The work that we have all done to resolve the issues that have been bothering us for decades was not easy. We finally are in a position where singers, lyricists, composers, sound recording owners and publishers are all ready to sit at the same table and

chat with each other and debate on how to grow the business. Both these societies, the Indian Performing Right Society Limited (IPRS) and Indian Singers and Musicians Rights Association (ISAMRA), are doing a fabulous job. So, hats off to Rakesh Nigam and Sanjay Tandon.

The industry exists because of Content Creators. Without them, there is no industry. I often joke that if we label heads had the talent, we would be standing in front of the mike. Only with people creative enough to compose or write or sing songs, does this industry survive. They are the basic foundation of this industry. And we always need to find ways to encourage them in a very fair and transparent fashion, to inspire those people who are putting their life and soul into their work.



To earn more, it's very important that all stakeholders come together.
Artistes who are the Creators, Music Labels who are the Financial Investors and Platforms who are the Revenue Generators



Because if artists don't get rewarded, fresh talent is not going to appear and it would be unfair to the entire industry.

Secondly, the ones who often end up getting a bad name, and I'm a representative of them, are the music labels, the guys who are investing in the Content. The only people who are taking risks and actually putting finance on the table. When a film comes out, we are the first people to go out and invest the seed money towards

the cost of production of a film. On an average, 10-15% of the cost of a film is usually recovered via the music rights that film producers sell to labels. Purchasing the music rights of an A category star film today can cost anywhere between ₹15-25 crore for 4-5 songs, this gets topped up with another ₹3-5 crore for the marketing budget. That's the investment a label is making when an album is released. For non-film music, the cost can be

anything from ₹25 lakhs to ₹2 crore. Combined with video production and marketing costs, there is a large amount of money spent on one song. We are not doing this for charity. Everybody out here invests for commercial reasons. We all need to go out and make money.

Another thought that people in the industry all agree - not all songs can be hits. If we can manage just 10% of the songs becoming hits, I think we have

done a fabulous job. So those 10% songs, must not only recover their own cost but also the cost of the remaining 90% releases. Otherwise, how will labels invest? Artists do not always view labels fairly, if labels don't get returns for the money that they are putting in, they will stop investing in content and talent.

Then there are the revenue generators – the platforms. They get vilified even more than the labels. Everybody thinks that they take care of only their own interests. Platforms spend tons of money to build multi featured, high-tech streaming services and then to acquire customers. And how do they make money? Through advertising and subscription. Whatever revenue they generate, they pay labels or publishers who in turn pay the artists. That's how this music economy works.

For all of us to prosper, we need to understand this economy. Let's jump into advertising. On AVOD platforms, where you don't have to pay a subscription fee, you can watch content free of cost. If advertising comes in, the content IP owner ends up getting a share from the platform. The number one platform in this space, globally and in India, does a fabulous job of running this in the most transparent fashion where everybody puts up their content and gets paid fairly.

But a new problem suddenly has popped up over the last 2-3 years.

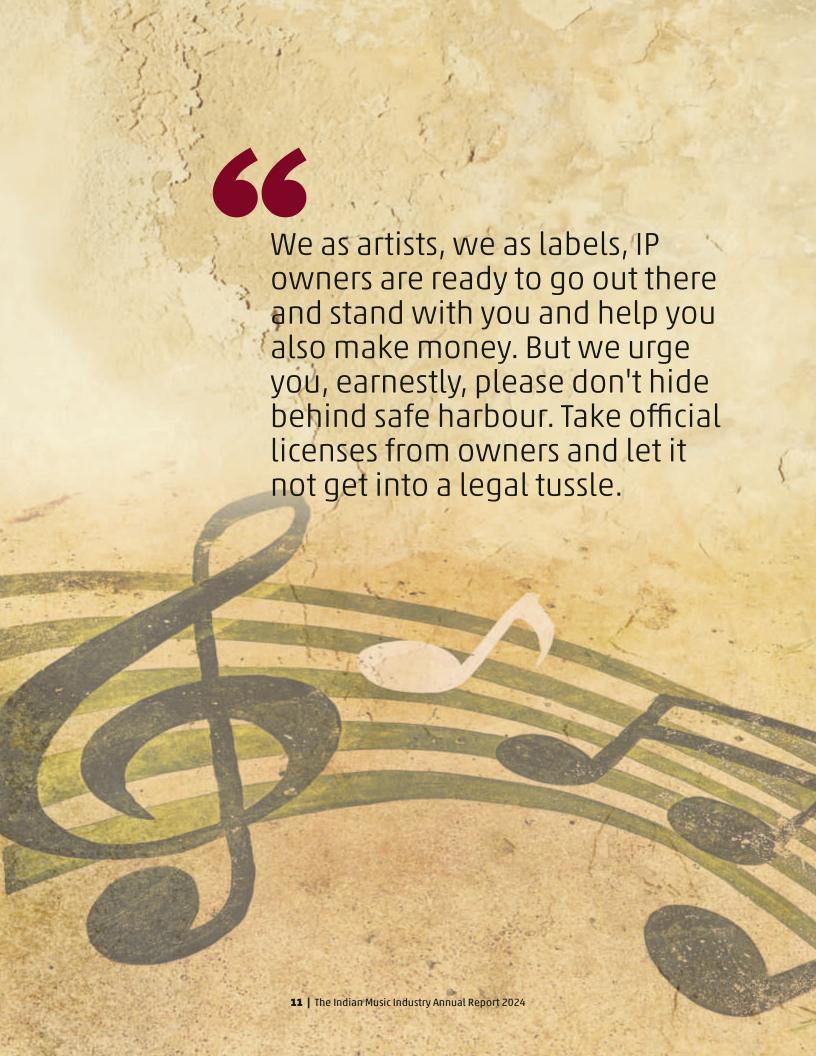


What I'm referring to are short format apps. Now, these short format apps seem to be gobbling all the eyeballs away from long format AVOD platforms. Oneminute videos seem to resonate more compared to 3-minute or 5minute music videos. This would not have made a major difference to us except for one problem. Short format apps, for their own business reasons, are not promoting advertising on their platforms. Which means that the content that was created with the sweat of the creator and the monies of a music label is being consumed by a customer for free, and the music industry is not getting paid in a fair fashion.

We earnestly request all short format content creators that we in the music industry are willing to support you. So please open your platforms to advertising and start

sharing advertising money with us the way long format AVOD platforms are doing.

Let's look at the second form of revenue generation, Subscription. Over 700 million people globally are paying for subscription. The world's biggest music OTT platform has over 80% of its revenue coming through subscription. If you check out any of the global music labels, majority of their revenue comes from share of platform subscription. Subscription is the key, and it needs to grow. The good news is, two of the Indian platforms this year decided to go fully behind paywalls. There are only two platforms that are left which still offer free services - they happen to be the number one & two in the country. We urge both of them to turn pay - please, you need to trust Indian customers and go behind paywalls.



People often comment that Indians are misers and are not going to pay. Well, 120 million Indians today pay for digital cable and DTH. This validates that Indian customer is ready to pay for quality and convenience.

People are ready to pay. It's our lazy marketing attitude that ends up saying Indians don't want to pay. 80 to 100 million people today pay for video OTT apps in India. Why won't they pay for music? Our country is a music crazy country. At Saregama we strongly believe that if we get the pricing right - I am saying for a dollar a month, you can easily get anything between 50 to 100 million people paying for a paywalled audio OTT app. And that means platforms, labels and most importantly artists are going to make much more money. And the Indian music industry is bound to go to one of the top spots in the global ranking.

Let me raise another pet peeve we have in the industry. We urge all the platforms that encourage user generated content to please stop taking the protection of safe harbour norms. Safe harbour norms were created decades back to protect ISPs from being held responsible for the content that was uploaded using their networks. But when the same platforms now run advertising and make money from it, it is very unfair to hide behind safe harbour norms. We as artists, we as labels, IP owners are ready to go out

there and stand with you and help you also make money. But we urge you, earnestly, please don't hide behind safe harbour. Take official licenses from owners and let it not get into a legal tussle.

A piece of advice for the labels. It is very good to work with the top talent. We have some great, amazing artists in our country. But if you want to prepare the entire economy of the music industry, you need to invest in newer talent. You cannot only keep investing in the larger artists and the bigger artists. And investing in younger talent needs a lot of patience. Not all things are going to go right just as when we labels buy songs, not all our songs become hits. So as you are investing in new songs, start investing in newer artists also.

Vinit Thakkar's very smart advice to me was that, please when you are investing in artists, invest only in that artist with a fire in the belly to succeed on his or her own. Only then can a label do wonders with and for them. But as labels, you should be absolutely ready to invest big monies on new talents.

Another couple of points, collectively we must fight piracy. Piracy in the larger towns, in the form of pirated CDs, is not prevalent any longer. But in smaller towns piracy is still very rampant. And piracy is just unfair to everybody, to platforms, to

labels and to artists. We are working very closely with the government of India on this. And I think IMI and Blaise have done a fabulous job liaising both with the state government and the central government to ensure that piracy finally diminishes.

Public performance. This is an area which I think is not fully monetised. We are making money, but far more money can be made here. If you compare the revenue that we create in our country, it's very little compared to what's happening in other parts of the world.

Under the guidance of the ministry, all stakeholders have now come together to create a mechanism of single-window licensing, which is all done under the leadership of Anup Jalota ii. We need to ensure that end users do not have to run to 4-5 different parties to get their licenses cleared. And there's an equal onus sitting on event organizers. We will remove the hurdles so that very soon there's a single-window licensing happening. But please ensure everybody is taking a clear license to avoid spending unnecessary time and energy in litigation.

Sitting in Mumbai, many of us are often seeing Bollywood music is leading followed by Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bhoipuri etc

There's a lot of action now happening even in Odiya,



Chhattisgarhi, Assamese, Pahari and Haryanvi as well and further beyond. Go to those markets. If you want to promote music in local languages, don't try to manage it sitting in Mumbai. Too lazy to travel, like me? Then find people who are based in those states, let them find artists and go by their inputs. India is massive. And this new India that we are seeing over the last 10 years is an India that is really in love with its roots, in love with its languages, in love with its culture. You will see a large boost in regional content, both in films and music, as we go forward.

Today, anything between around ₹1,000 to ₹1,200 crores is invested by labels on newer content. We believe this number can grow multifold. Far more investments can be made. We are collectively working on various policy initiatives and issues like single window licensing and safe harbour norms. We are working very closely with the government, and we are hopeful that we will find quick solutions so that the industry can drive far more investments.

We want to thank Honourable Minister Mr. Piyush Goyal ji, Additional Secretary Ms. Himani

Pande ji, Director Mr. Karan Thapar ji, Director Ms. Simrat Kaur ji and Consultant to the Department Mr. Raghavendra ji, for the way that they are working, helping and guiding us to ensure that the Indian industry becomes far more profitable than ever before.

And lastly, a bit of advice, from this old man. Please experiment. Please stop playing safe. Take a little more risk. And be ready to accept failures. Only then, will we be able to create something magical for the companies that we are working with and for ourselves.



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The economics of a music ecosystem has a new term called SWIFTONOMICS named after the US-based songwriter and singer Taylor Swift, given the profound economic impact the performer has on any local economy where her concerts take place.

BLAISE FERNANDES, PRESIDENT & CEO, IMI

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### **MUSIC TOURISM**

# AN OPPORTUNITY WAITING TO HAPPEN

What do Glastonbury in the UK, Austin Texas in the USA and Toronto in Canada all have in common? They all have a very robust music tourism ecosystem built from scratch over the years. The global live music business accounted for USD 33.1 billion in 2023 and growing at an annual rate of 25 %. In 2023, the Glastonbury music festival brought in around USD 217.86 million in revenues and the county of Somerset earned USD 41.50 million in revenues from allied activities around the Glastonbury festival. Austin annually earns USD 1.8 billion through music tourism and also hosts, annually, the premiere music festival South by Southwest (SXSW) which brings in USD 280.7 million in revenues, Toronto earned USD 850 million in revenues<sup>4</sup> in 2022 from music tourism. <sup>5</sup>

The economics of a music ecosystem has a new term called SWIFTONOMICS named after the US-based songwriter and singer Taylor Swift, given the profound economic impact the performer has on any local economy where her concerts take place. But even before Taylor Swift, a music performance, festival or recital aka music tourism has had a direct effect on the local economy. Music tourism drives up occupancy levels at hotels, domestic air travel and local transportation. Local food and beverage outlets see a spurt in sales and most importantly, an increase in admissions at local tourist spots.

 $<sup>^{1}</sup>$  https://www.goldmansachs.com/intelligence/pages/gs-research/music-in-the-air-focus-on-monetisation-emerging-markets-and-ai/report.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/18840/html/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk/#:~:text=The%20report%2C%20carried%20out%20by,for%20businesses%20based%20in%20Somerset

https://www.kxan.com/news/sxsw/how-development-campaigns-are-impacting-austins-live-music-industry/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/90a2-2022-2026EDCBrandedMusic-StrategyC5-test.pdf

<sup>6</sup> https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2022-11-23/what-taylor-swift-reveals-about-us-economy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.cbsnews.com/news/taylor-swift-eras-tour-boosted-economy-tourism-federal-reserve-how-much-money-made/

<sup>8</sup> https://www.politico.eu/article/beyonce-world-tour-renaissance-stockholm-caused-inflation-hike-in-sweden-expert-says/



Authorities such as the Sports Authority of India (SAI), the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), Hockey India as well as State-wise Cricket Associations and State governed authorities such as the municipal bodies and state sports authorities operate numerous sporting venues across the country. Like in most sports which have their seasons, these stadiums or facilities are not used for the majority of the year. Lack of revenue is the main reason why most sporting venues are in shambles and some are not even usable today. The relevant authorities should examine the possibilities of creating these stadiums into multipurpose venues through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. The Wembley<sup>9</sup> & Edgbaston stadiums in England are good examples of sports venues being turned into multipurpose venues and yes, Football and Cricket are still played on a regular basis at the two stadiums respectively, and football and cricket associated with these two stadiums are always given priority with dates earmarked in advance for games for better planning. The PPP model must also have a roadmap towards a zeroemission multipurpose venue. Diversity and inclusion are another area of focus that should be given paramount importance. Lastly, if the aim of the PPP model is to

build a music tourism ecosystem, proper thought should also be given in drafting the PPP terms and conditions of making it worthwhile for the investor. The ecosystem approach is about understanding how a decision on one side impacts the other side.

A well thought through music ecosystem policy by the Indian government must also take into consideration for creating a local music industry fuelled by skill development and the National Education Policy 2020 has recognised music as a subject of study, so there should be a policy to vigorously integrate music as a subject in the curriculum of schools across the country. Music has a cost. The policy must protect the rights of stakeholders per the Copyright Act. Music acts as a driver for mental well-being and action against climate change and the policy must take into consideration these facts. India has given the world some of the finest performers and musicians across all genres and this rich music legacy must be celebrated.

A PPP model would attract global giants like Anschutz
Entertainment Group (AEG), CTS
Eventim, Ticketmaster and also local giants like BookmyShow,
Reliance & Jindal, who both have sport management arms. Given India's economic prowess, with a

GDP that now stands at USD 3.94 trillion,<sup>10</sup> a demographic dividend with a working population of 920.2 million,<sup>11</sup> it's an opportunity that global and domestic entities will not want to miss.

A robust Music Tourism economy would be a fitting tribute to some of the finest talent from India, to name a few who have contributed in a big way to the music scenario globally: Bharat Ratna the late M.S. Subbulakshmi, Bharat Ratna the late Lata Mangeshkar, Padma Vibhushan the late Kishori Amonkar, Padma Vibhushan the late S. P. Balasubrahmanyam, the late tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, the late Anthony Gonsalves, the late Chris Perry, the living legend Padma Vibhushan Asha Bhosle and one of the most popular artists in present times Diljit Dosanjh. The quest for being the Cannes of the east through IFFI is still work in progress but the opportunity to be the South-by-Southwest (SXSW) where music meets technology is an opportunity waiting to happen, and Indian airports have enough parking slots for the private jets.

<sup>9</sup> https://sportsvenuebusiness.com/2024/02/20/wembley-stadiums-major-revamp-ahead-of-historic-2024/

<sup>10</sup> https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IND#countrydata

<sup>11</sup> https://thewire.in/labour/india-china-population-labour-force





# EXPERT SPEAKS



### **JAY MEHTA**

MD (INDIA & SAARC), WARNER MUSIC GROUP

# Powering Regional Sounds & Global Hits in the Digital Era

What trends do you foresee for the Indian music market that supplements Warner Music Group's global expansion plans?

India's music landscape is evolving rapidly, with three key trends shaping its future. First, the surge in digital music consumption is unprecedented. With platforms like YouTube and Spotify dominating, India has become the second-largest streaming market globally. But what's truly exciting is how audiences are exploring beyond Bollywood - regional and independent music are having their moment, reflecting a shift in listener preferences.

Second, strategic partnerships are playing a crucial role in unlocking new opportunities for artists and fans. Our regional tie-ups with companies like Divo and GMJ have strengthened our presence across Tamil, Bhojpuri, Kannada and Punjabi music markets, allowing us to tap into deeply engaged fan bases. This regional expansion is not just about reach - it's about fostering music cultures that are now breaking into the mainstream.

Finally, as Indian music continues to make waves globally, the focus is shifting beyond just releasing music - it's about building an entire ecosystem around artists. Initiatives like 91 North Records, our joint venture with Warner Music Canada and 5 Junction - a crossover imprint and WMG's most recent partnership with Anjula Acharia - underscore our commitment to positioning South Asian artists on the global stage.



But for true expansion, artists need more than just A&R and marketing; they need a full-service ecosystem. This includes everything from world-class studios and live performance opportunities to brand collaborations and audience-building strategies that bring them closer to their fans. Today's artists aren't just musicians; they're cultural icons, and our goal is to support them at every stage of their journey - both in India and beyond.

Warner Music India has rapidly scaled in the Indian music industry, securing a top-five position. What are the headwinds and tailwinds in your journey to break into the top three?

When we launched in 2020, many considered it ambitious to aim for a top-three spot in such a competitive market. Today, we're close to achieving that, thanks to a clear strategy and a phenomenal team.

Our tailwinds include a strong artist roster with names like King and Darshan Raval, along with strategic acquisitions like Divo, E-Positive and GMJ, which have expanded our presence across regional and independent music. The launch of Maati has reinforced our commitment to India's cultural diversity, while 91 North Records and Warner Music South Asia are taking Indian and South Asian music to a global stage.



Internationally, Indian audiences are increasingly open to global genres, with artists like Ed Sheeran and Dua Lipa consistently performing well here. What's heartening is the reverse flow-Indian artists are also making it big in markets beyond India.

Challenges remain - monetization in a price-sensitive market, fierce competition from both major and regional players, and the need to balance Bollywood with the rise of independent and regional music. However, our hyper-local strategy - partnering with regional powerhouses, nurturing local genres, and tailoring our approach to different cultural markets - gives us a unique advantage.

But our goal isn't just market position - it's about shaping the future of music in India. By strengthening regional ecosystems, investing in live entertainment and fostering deeper artist-fan connections, we're not just competing; we're redefining the landscape.

#### How does Warner Music India plan to unfold its Artists' Roster to Indian listeners and global audiences, especially with initiatives like **SkillBox?**

SkillBox is a fantastic step forward for us, allowing deeper engagement with audiences through live entertainment and ticketing. Domestically, we're focusing on creating memorable experiences for fans by hosting concerts and festivals that bring our artists closer to their audience.

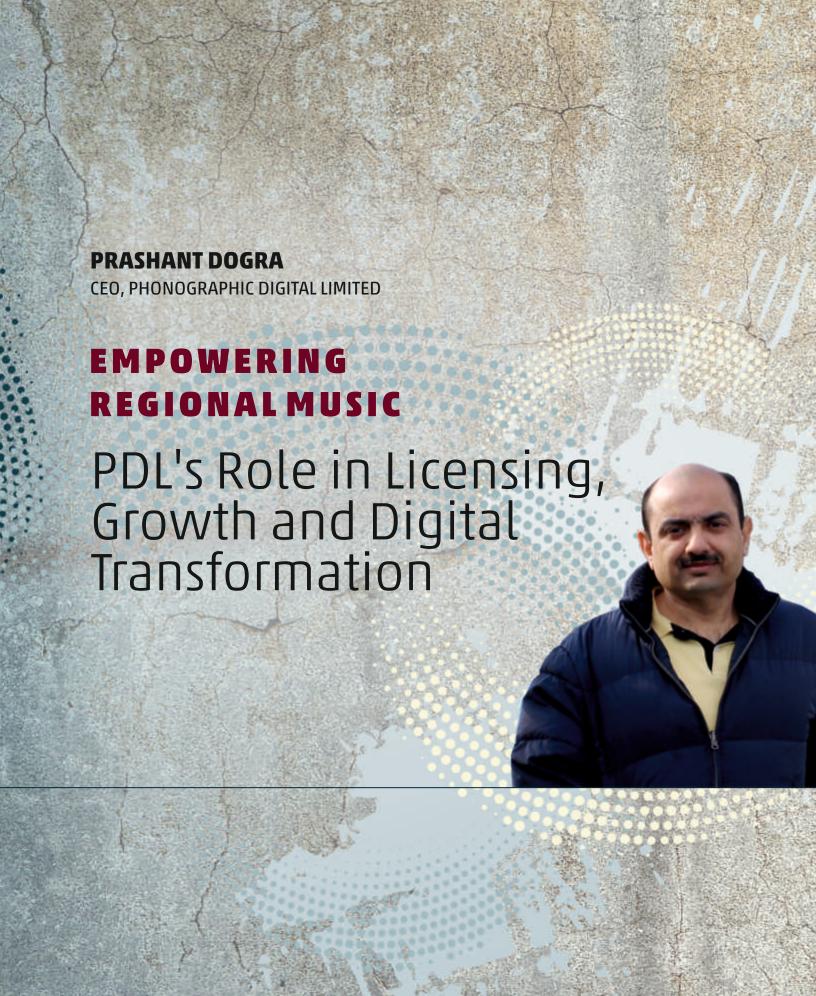
Globally, we're taking Indian music where it hasn't been before. Through 91 North Records, we've started making South Asian music a mainstream offering in North America, not just for the diaspora. Artists like Diljit Dosanjh and King have shown that the world is ready for this. Our partnerships, whether with regional players or global brands, are all aimed at ensuring our artists have the tools they need to resonate on every stage.

#### With the increasing importance of digital platforms and Warner Music India's hits topping IMI Charts, what trends do you observe in the domestic and international charts?

Digital platforms have completely transformed how music is discovered and consumed. In India, we're seeing regional tracks dominate streaming charts, reflecting the appetite for authentic, localized content. For instance, our partnerships with Divo, EYP, GMJ and Sky Digital have propelled artists from Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Haryanvi and Bhojpuri music scenes to mainstream recognition.

Internationally, Indian audiences are increasingly open to global genres, with artists like Ed Sheeran and Dua Lipa consistently performing well here. What's heartening is the reverse flow - Indian artists are also making it big in markets beyond India. Tracks like Diljit and Sia's Hass Hass have seen success in multiple markets plus King and Jasleen Royal, whose songs were the first and second artists from India to ever hit the Global Top 25 on Spotify.





PDL has played a pivotal role in licensing and managing rights for record labels, especially in the digital domain. How has the content consumption of regional music labels been growing? What can be expected from this growth in regional music consumption?

The content consumption of regional music labels has been growing exponentially, driven by the increasing demand for local music content. In India, for instance, regional language music accounts for over 35% of music consumption on OTT audio streaming platforms, with more than half of users coming from smaller cities. And this growth for regional content is expected to continue strongly because the rise of digital platforms has eliminated traditional distribution barriers, enabling regional music to reach a wider audience. For PDL, regional music contributes almost 80% of the revenues. In our view, the key drivers for growth are: (i) increased accessibility of regional content to a broader audience due to the emergence of digital platforms; (ii) with the regional content becoming stronger, there is increased impetus to rise of local talent, whose content in their mother tongue(s) is now being appreciated by audiences in other language regions also; (iii) Improvements in personalization by the DSPs, with streaming algorithms giving personalised

recommendations pandering to the preferred languages of the consumers.

The music industry has been undergoing rapid digital transformation. What are the key challenges regional record labels face today in monetizing their content, aside from piracy and safe harbour protections? How is PDL addressing these challenges?

PDL has already taken care of several of the challenges faced by regional record labels. PDL has ensured that transparency is provided to the regional labels and data insights are provided in detail to them. Also, the regional labels today increasingly depend on PDL to manage their digital infrastructure and distribute their content at low cost across the world.

The biggest intervention PDL has done is to ensure that regional labels get their content showcased effectively and thereby enabling effective marketing and promotion strategies, which significantly increase their visibility.

Regional labels still struggle to get transparent enablement of rights other than sound recording (which is managed by PDL). This is a gap area that the industry must focus on resolving.

PDL has been at the forefront of leveraging technology to streamline copyright administration on behalf of its members. Can you elaborate on the key technological advancements PDL has implemented in the past year to unlock the licensing opportunities?

Over the last few years, PDL has significantly invested in leveraging technology to ensure regional labels get their due exposure under the sun. Right from using data-driven analytics to support the smaller regional labels, to a state-of-the-art royalty tracking software, which enables the fastest payment mechanism in the industry.

The biggest intervention has been to create a content-marketing software which helps PDL members to organise their promotional calendar and ensure the speed-to-market is the bestin-class.

Currently, PDL is working to advance its rights management



The biggest intervention has been to create a contentmarketing software which helps PDL members to organise their promotional calendar and ensure the speed-to-market is the best-in-class.



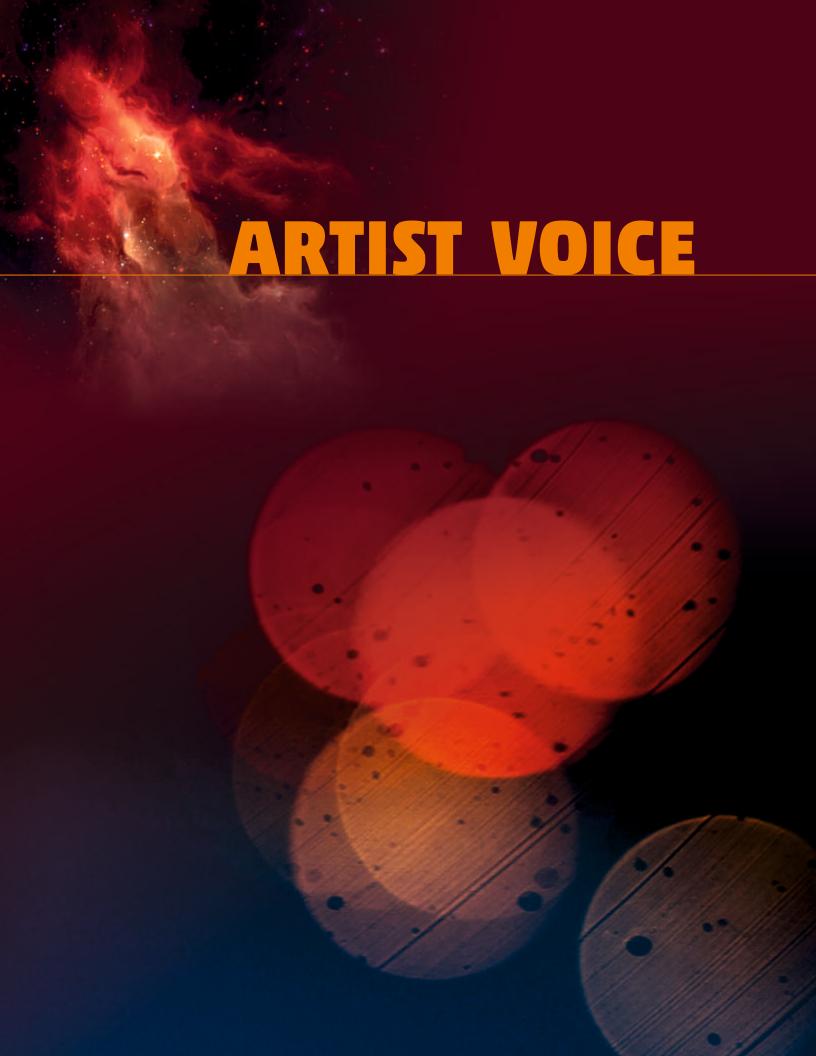
software to facilitate its members to serve/process rights other than sound recording (Sound recording is monetised by PDL), even though we don't earn revenues from there. It is PDL's core belief that smaller labels who are not tech-savvy, should be facilitated so that the smaller labels and their artists are able to earn from all rights seamlessly.

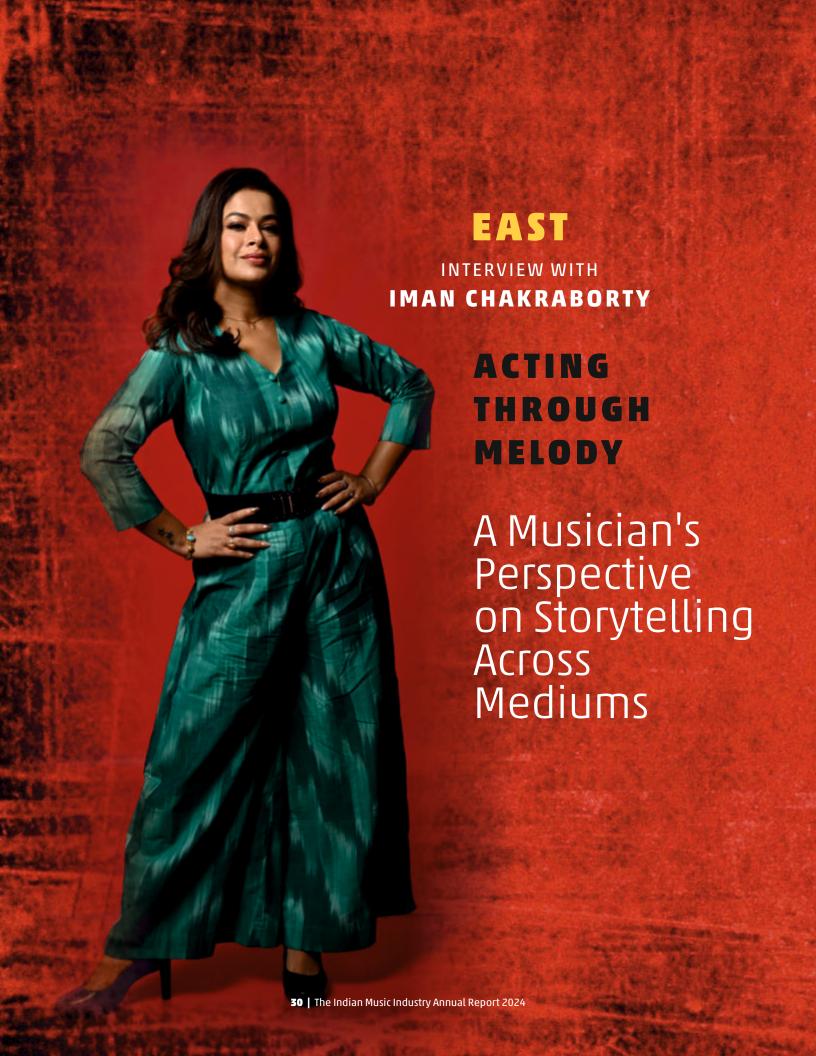
Looking ahead, what are PDL's key priorities for the next year? What strategies will be adopted to enhance revenue streams, strengthen rights management and support the growth of India's recorded music industry?

PDL will continue to focus extensively on content marketing and creating further transparency for its members using its low-cost model. Additionally, PDL will work on advocacy for policies that help grow the regional labels. We are also working extensively on education of the PDL ecosystem, about all the rights that creators can benefit from and to ensure that their copyright is protected.

As regional music consumption continues to grow, we can expect to see more investment in artist development, marketing and data analytics capabilities. The lines between genres will continue to blur, leading to innovative sounds and collaborations.







## How did growing up in a musically inclined family shape your early relationship with music?

Growing up in a musically inclined family was a blessing. It was like music was always in the air whether through my parents humming a tune, family gatherings filled with harmonies, or hearing stories about legendary musicians. It instilled in me an organic love for melodies and rhythms. Music wasn't just something to learn; it became a way of life. Those early years taught me to feel music emotionally before understanding it technically and that foundation still guides me today.

# Rabindranath Tagore's works have been a major influence on your music. How do you reinterpret his compositions for today's audiences?

Tagore's works are timeless but presenting them to today's audiences requires a delicate balance. I focus on retaining the soul of his compositions while weaving in contemporary arrangements and nuances that resonate with modern listeners. Whether it's experimenting with fusion or simplifying certain elements, the goal is to connect people to the depth of his words and music without losing their essence.

Your training spans Hindustani classical and folk music. How do

### you blend these influences in your performances?

Hindustani classical music has given me discipline and depth, while folk music has taught me to embrace raw emotion. Blending these comes naturally because both are deeply rooted in storytelling. In my performances, I often use classical techniques to enhance the emotional arcs of folk songs or add an earthy texture to classical compositions by drawing from folk influences. This fusion helps me create a unique and relatable sound.

# Your debut album, Boste Dio Kache, marked the beginning of your professional journey. What inspired the creative direction of that album?

Boste Dio Kache was my heartfelt attempt to find my voice as an artist. The album was inspired by my personal experiences, observations and the emotions I wanted to share with the world. I worked hard to ensure it felt honest and reflective of who I was at the time. That sense of authenticity struck a chord with listeners and made the album so special to me.

### Winning a National Film Award for your first film song is a remarkable achievement. How did "Tumi Jake Bhalobasho" shape your career?

Winning the National Film Award for "Tumi Jake Bhalobasho" was a life-changing moment. The song gave me recognition and opened doors I hadn't even imagined. It also taught me the importance of staying true to the song's emotion rather than overthinking its delivery. That experience shaped my career by building my confidence and broadening my horizons as an artist.

# You've received acclaim for playback singing as well as independent projects. How do you approach the creative process differently for each?

Playback singing and independent projects come with different creative energies. Playback is about understanding the character, the mood of the scene, and the director's vision—it's like stepping into someone else's shoes. Independent music, on the other hand, is my space to express my personal feelings, experiment and tell my own stories. Both





Balancing classical roots with modern trends is an ongoing process. The key is staying grounded in tradition while being open to experimentation.

processes keep me creatively fulfilled, but they require different mindsets.

#### What role does your academy, Iman Sangeet Academy, play in nurturing the next generation of musicians?

Iman Sangeet Academy focuses on creating a nurturing environment where budding musicians can grow. It's not just about teaching techniques but also about inspiring them to find their unique voices. We emphasize holistic learning, blending technical mastery with emotional expression and help students gain confidence through live performances and practical

exposure. Watching them blossom is incredibly rewarding.

# How do you maintain balance between classical roots and modern trends in the evolving Bengali music scene?

Balancing classical roots with modern trends is an ongoing process. The key is staying grounded in tradition while being open to experimentation. I make it a point to respect classical structures and techniques but incorporate modern production styles, genres and collaborations. It's about creating fresh yet familiar music that appeals to both purists and contemporary audiences.

# With your ventures into acting, do you find that storytelling through music differs from storytelling on screen?

Music and acting are different mediums, but both are rooted in storytelling. Through music, I convey emotions that people feel in their hearts, often leaving space for interpretation. Acting, however, requires embodying a character fully - it's more immersive and visual. Both mediums complement each other, and my musical background has helped me approach acting with rhythm, flow, and emotion. Each adds depth to the other in ways I truly cherish.





RUPAM ISLAM

PERFORMANCES
TOROCK STARDOM

A Musical Journey





### Growing up in a musical family, how did your early exposure to platforms like Akashvani and Doordarshan shape your understanding of performance?

It was not about performing on Akashvani and Doordarshan. My performance began at the age of four on stage at Ballygunge Siksha Sadan. With just one day of preparation, I played an instrument in our musical choir, run by my parents. That's when they realized I had an extraordinary talent for music. My journey as a singer began with songs composed by my father and written by my mother. My first performance was not a recording but a live broadcast on Doordarshan, featuring a very difficult classical song. That's how my journey of performing in front of people started. I was so young that I didn't feel the pressure of singing live without making a mistake.

As for Akashvani, my first performance there was with my parents. I watched their recordings from the control room. In fact, I had to hide behind a screen in the control room because the producer wouldn't have allowed a child like

me to participate. However, once they found me, I was sent back, and my mother couldn't take part in that recording either—she had to leave with me.

Even before I was officially allowed into these big platforms, I had already been immersed in this cultural world. My very first stage performance at the age of four happened after a battle with my parents. On the final day, I declared that I would not stay in the auditorium unless I was on stage with them. Left with no choice, they gave me a percussion instrument, and that's how I made my stage debut.

This early experience had a profound impact on my journey. The stage became my home, probably because I was born into such a family and had to fight through obstacles to perform. Whether it was stepping onto the stage, reaching Akashvani, or proving my worth by singing on Doordarshan, my journey had begun long before those moments.

You performed on Doordarshan at the age of nine as your first major public performance. How did that experience influence

### your confidence and passion for music at such a young age?

I began participating in various competitions at the age of six, focusing on sit-and-draw and recitation contests, ironically neither of which involved singing. Under my mother's guidance, I continued to participate in numerous competitions, consistently securing positions in all except vocal events.

Interestingly, I never relied on the harmonium as my primary instrument, unlike many others. Later, I discovered that using the harmonium can actually lead to striking incorrect chords. My teachers further enlightened me that following the correct scale while singing is a more effective approach than relying on the harmonium.

The intricate nuances of singing, or 'gaiki,' can be better grasped through the method I employed. Notably, I topped my four-year Bani Chakra course and examinations, achieving first position throughout.

English literature often influences songwriting. How has your academic background

#### contributed to the lyrical depth of your music?

Reading English literature is indeed great exposure, as the questioner has rightly pointed out. While studying English literature and being guided by highly qualified professors, I came to understand what literature truly means. Through this journey, I also grasped the essence of culture.

As a result, I experienced a literary and cultural revolution within myself. I realized that true artists are not bound by existing conventions; rather, they create new traditions. This understanding came to me through English literature.

English literature spans different eras, each with its own distinct poetic sensibilities. Studying the works of poets, playwrights and novelists from various periods revealed how literature evolves, adapts and touches the depths of artistic expression in new ways. This discovery was both enlightening and mesmerizing.

In every era, there was always someone whose work resonated with me the most, whether from the Romantic period, the Modern era, or the Metaphysical poets. All these influences ultimately shaped the very roots of my songwriting and composition.

Fossils has played a pivotal role in popularizing Bengali rock. What inspired the band's unique sound and message?

A major milestone in my musical journey was the founding of Fossils. Fossils made two significant contributions.

The first was in the creation of words. While I was already composing music - crafting the lyrics, melodies and emotions -Fossils played a crucial role in refining the choice of words and the emotional intensity they carried. Everyone in Fossils was incredibly supportive in this regard. I had spent years searching for the right musical collaborators, and when I finally found them, I worked on their terms. Through that process, I learned a lot, and in turn, they must have also found in me a raw creative force that helped bring their unspoken thoughts into words.

The second major contribution of Fossils was in performance.
Together, we created a stage presence that resonated not only with our generation but also with the intermediate and current

generations - a journey spanning nearly 30 years (with 27 years of official existence). Even before Fossils was formally established, its creative process had already begun, making it a full threedecade-long evolution.

If I divide this journey into three decades, one remarkable aspect stands out: our audience's unwavering connection to our performances. Fans, followers, and listeners - across different eras - experience the same excitement at our concerts. This is because our performances were not just aligned with the times but often ahead of them.

The struggles of life - the constant battle of existence - were always reflected in our music. If we had not been able to translate that battle into a compelling stage experience, people wouldn't have related to it for such a long time.

## 66

With minimal equipment, I recorded 40 songs at home and compiled them into two cassettes. I then started distributing them to different places, enduring countless rejections, endless waiting, and years of struggle. After a long journey, I finally passed the audition at HMV, and my first album was released.

And this performance, this powerful connection, was not something I could have created alone. It was a collective effort - something we built together.

## As a solo artist, how do you balance the identity of Fossils with your individual musical projects?

This brings us to the point that, later on, I pursued a solo career, though I had been solo even before Fossils. Before Fossils, I had already been part of four different bands, none of which found success. The names of these bands were:

- 1. Rhythm
- 2. Rhythmic
- 3. Haridaser Dana
- 4. Doorer Gangchil

After going through these four phases and not finding success, I decided to go solo. I began recording my songs at home because I couldn't afford studio time. At that time, I had a very basic keyboard, which cost 13,500 - a price that clearly indicates how amateur the

instrument was. No professional artist would have been able to produce significant work with such a setup, but I did.

My recording setup consisted of:

- A video call double-deck cassette player
- An Ahuja microphone
- A Stenzar amplifier
- A locally made Lipton electric guitar, which I had bought from Wellington's store

With this minimal equipment, I recorded 40 songs at home and compiled them into two cassettes. I then started distributing them to different places, enduring countless rejections, endless waiting, and years of struggle. After a long journey, I finally passed the audition at HMV (His Master's Voice), and my first album was released.

That was the first phase of my solo career. Later, I found the members of Fossils, formed the band, and built my career in the playback industry. Nearly ten years later, I returned to solo performances -

but in a new way. This time, I performed completely alone on stage, without any band or collaborators. I played the guitar and piano myself, performing songs that were then unpopular or unknown.

This new form of solo performance was an artistic creation in itself. But at its core, it was deeply rooted in what I had learned from performing with Fossils. My experience and education from Fossils shaped this journey.

By 2007, I had already started working in playback music. The combined impact of everything - band music, playback, struggles, and stage performances - helped refine and establish my solo identity, making it worthy of being shared with the world.

## Winning the National Film Award for Mahanagar@Kolkata was a milestone. What made that song resonate with audiences and critics alike?

This was completely unexpected. I had no idea that my song would win such a prestigious award. I never imagined I would receive



something like this. There was no indication that it would happen but it did.

After winning, I spoke to the jury members because I wanted to understand how this became possible. They told me that my song had brought the film to life and that was the key factor for which I was awarded.

For me, this was a fortunate coincidence, a pleasant surprise, and a piece of good news. I also believe that I have done great work before, and I will continue to do so in the future. However, getting recognized is something that depends on timing and circumstances. It's not just about creating something great - it's also about when and where it reaches the right people.

When the right thing reaches the right place, at the right time, and is heard by the right ears, that's what I call a natural alignment – a perfect moment. A beautifully crafted message can be created, but whether it reaches the right person at the right time is purely a matter of fate.

This doesn't mean that this was my best creation. I have created works of equal or even higher quality before and after this. But perhaps they were not made for films. And if a song is not part of a film, it cannot win a film award, right?

A film song exists within the framework of the movie. It

depends on the script, the story, and often even on the film's overall success. Sometimes, even great music may not receive recognition simply because of the film's reception.

So, I can only say this - many incredible songs do not receive the recognition they deserve. And that's just the way things are

You've composed jingles for television alongside film and band music. How does creating music for commercials challenge or inspire your creativity?

In terms of quality, advertising jingles or film songs belong to the same category. The songs we create or sing for films are essentially used for promotional purposes. If you think about it, songs aren't always necessary for a film's narrative. In the works of many renowned filmmakers, unless it's a musical like "Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne" or "Heerak Rajar Deshe" songs aren't prominently featured. Therefore, the primary purpose of these songs is to aid in the marketing of the film - they are, in essence, advertisements.

Similarly, songs created directly for advertisements focus on a specific subject, and you have to compose accordingly. Now, when we create songs inspired by life or nature, aren't they also subject-specific? Life or nature presents a theme, compelling you to compose. I believe that true artistic creation stems from a compulsion rather than mere desire. One doesn't

write a song, poem, or story just for fun; it's the urge that drives creation.

So, whether it's for an advertisement or a film, when you're commissioned to create a song, you've accepted payment, and not composing isn't an option. In the end, all songs are born from a natural demand that can't be ignored. Therefore, to me, all songs are essentially the same; I don't see any difference. I've never sat down to write a song in a carefree mood. Every song I've written, whether for my personal journey or for an advertisement, has been under some form of pressure. If I'm in a relaxed state. I'd rather watch television or read a book. Why would I write a song?

#### As a member of the Bangla Sangeet Academy, how do you see the future of Bengali rock and its place in Indian music?

I consider myself a very humble member of the Bangla Sangeet Academy. The other members are all senior to me in age and experience, and their blessings are my greatest asset. I don't yet possess the qualifications to lead

or manage any initiatives within the academy.

Perhaps, in the future, as I grow older and gain more experience, I might be able to contribute more significantly to the promotion of Bangla rock and the academic establishment of this genre. For now, I see myself as a novice and a learner. I believe my primary focus should be on diligently honing my craft and improving myself.

When the time comes for me to share knowledge, I can then consider contributing to the academic foundation and promotion of Bangla rock.

## With your diverse roles as a composer, singer and writer, how do you prioritize and stay inspired across different creative outlets?

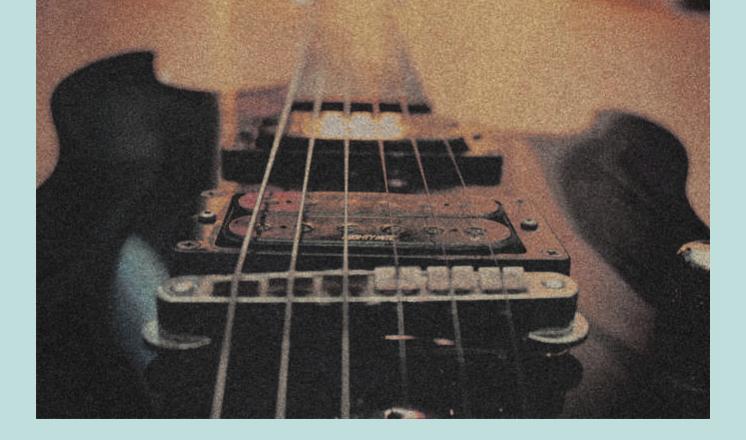
I began my singing journey with my own compositions. Prior to that, I performed songs composed by my parents and trained in various traditional musical genres prevalent in Bengali society, earning appreciation for my renditions.

In 1986, the esteemed cultural magazine "Desh" featured an article about my performance of devotional songs, referring to me as a "wonder child" and including my photograph. That same year, I was honored with the Uttam Kumar Award and the Chitra Vichitra Award, both highly prestigious at the time. I received these awards at a ceremony where the legendary Hemanta Mukhopadhyay was also honored. The event was graced by numerous luminaries from the Bengali film industry, underscoring the significance of the occasion.

Before I began performing my own songs, I established myself by singing compositions created by others. I sang songs composed by my parents and regularly performed works by various esteemed composers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rajanikanta Sen, Atul Prasad Sen, Dwijendralal Ray, as well as Lalon. Additionally, I engaged with a wide array of musical genres, including Bhajans, Khayal, Classical music, and traditional forms like Jhumur.



Perhaps, in the future, as I grow older and gain more experience, I might be able to contribute more significantly to the promotion of Bangla rock and the academic establishment of this genre.



In my early years, I composed tunes for children's rhymes, notably setting music to the verses of Annada Shankar Ray. This diverse musical journey enriched my experience and prepared me for creating and performing my own compositions.

Transitioning to original compositions, we formed a cultural, social, and political group named Abagaad Parishad. Our mission was to initiate a cultural revolution addressing various societal inequalities - be it economic disparities, gender biases, or religious superstitions. We advocated for atheism and rationalism. To promote our message, we established two branches: a publication, for which I served as the editor, and a musical group named Rhythm. In

this band, I took on roles as the lyricist, composer, musician (playing the keyboard), and supporting vocalist. The lead vocalist was my collaborator, known as Nine.

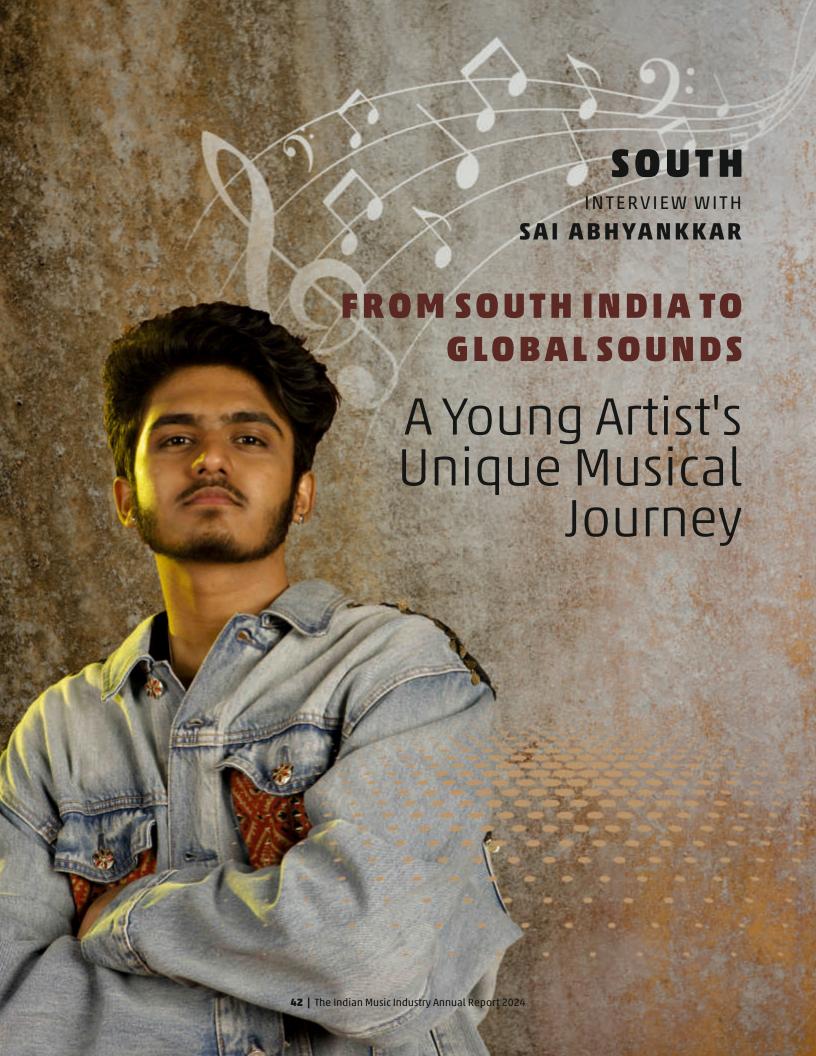
Our music was imbued with themes of social change and equality, sometimes overtly and other times subtly, even within love songs. Our journey into music was as the voice of a group promoting atheism and rationalism. Thus, whether prominently or in the background, a social message has always been an integral part of my musical creations.

What role do live performances play in conveying the energy and ethos of Fossils to your audience?

The dynamic between the performer and the audience has become entirely reciprocal. The energy you mentioned flows both ways, with each side inspiring the other.

What I observe in the auditorium invigorates my performance, infusing it with life. As I watch the audience, I attempt to absorb their vitality from the stage, while they, in turn, strive to draw the energy I emit.

I believe the essence of the grand celebration we create at each rock concert lies in this very exchange. The stage transcends its physical boundaries, transforming the entire area within earshot into a unified performance space.



## Starting a music journey at 11 is commendable. Can you tell us more about your journey in music, that too starting at a young age?

I am fortunate to have learned music from the best gurus, and I thank my parents for that. Their guidance and support are why I am here today. My vocal training with Mr. Sriram Parthasarathy, piano with Mr. A.D. Ramamurthy, Mridangam with Seshadri, Tabla with Suresh Sir, Drums with Nagi and Guitar with Kevin, among others, have been invaluable. Starting young allowed me to absorb a lot, and I continue to love learning. I feel very fortunate.

## "Simple yet intricate" is how you describe the music that inspires you. How do you go about achieving such a balance while creating music?

In my first introduction video released before 'Katchi Sera', I explained "Simple yet intricate" as my approach to music. I don't aim to create trending songs with millions of reels. Instead, I focus on what I like, my current mood, and how to reflect that in my music. My goal is to keep ideas simple yet musically rich, appealing to a broad audience. This blend of simplicity and commercial appeal is what I strive for in my work, by God's grace.

## How has growing up in South India influenced your musical style? What role did traditional sounds or culture play in your music?

The environment greatly influences the music created today. The peace and the people around us play a crucial role in our learning and creativity. I've been fortunate to have the best people around me, which has significantly impacted my musical style. The rich tradition of Carnatic music and ethnic sounds from the South inspire me to blend various international and classical ideas. This cultural diversity enhances the versatility of sounds, which can work wonders in films.

Your aim to produce "quirky, trippy, and musically-rich compositions". How do you define your genre of music, and how do you manifest the above components in your sound?

'Quirky' music grabs attention with its uniqueness, while 'trippy' sets a mood with its energy. I aim to make every song musically rich by blending classical and Hindustani music with sophisticated electronic sounds. Exploring various genres and making them quirky is my goal. I strive to incorporate this concept in all my compositions.



## Can you describe some of the biggest challenges you've faced in creating your own distinct sound, especially with such intricate musical ambitions?

I try to keep my thoughts simple and avoid overthinking when producing, singing, or composing. I follow my instincts, and by God's grace, it results in a distinct sound. I aim to be original, experiment, and create music that makes sense and has a unique taste.

## Are there any particular genres or styles that you haven't yet explored but would love to incorporate into your future projects?

I'm currently listening to a lot of rock and heavily processed metal songs, so I want to experiment in that genre.

### What are some of your favorite techniques or tools when it comes to creating "ear candies" within a track?

There are countless techniques, and the possibilities are endless. You can do anything, but each second of the song must be interesting. That's it.

## Music production has changed a lot over the years. Are there any specific trends or changes in music that have influenced how you produce today?

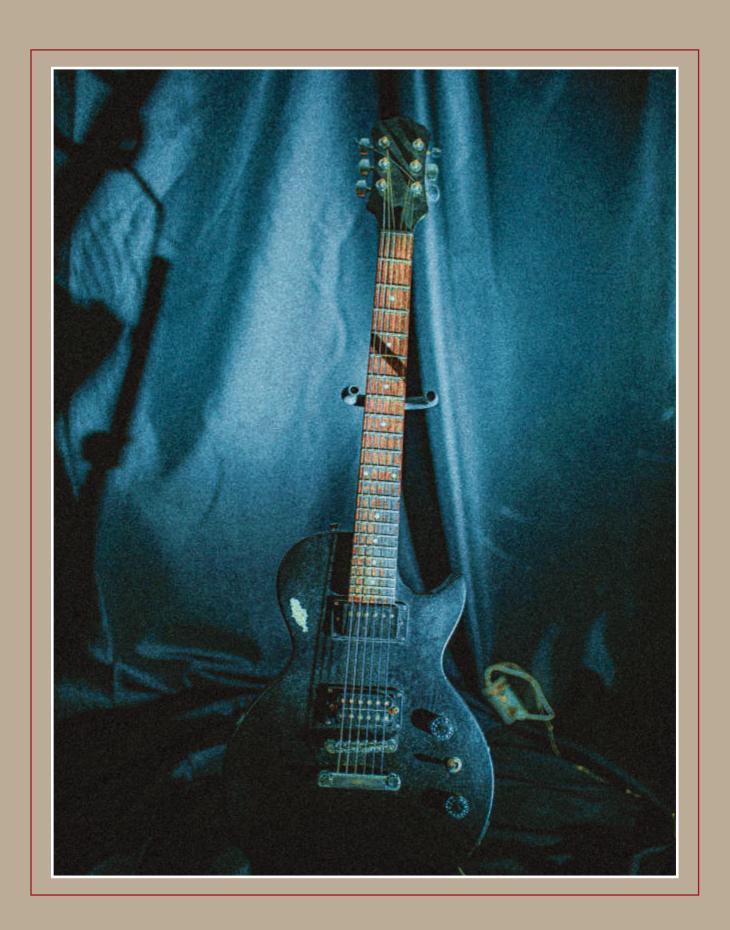
Production has become very simple now, with everyone having access to all the tools they need. By God's grace, it's a gift that this generation can explore every possibility. The workflow has become faster and more efficient, making it easy to produce or compose music quickly. Everything has been made easier.

#### For young producers who might be inspired by your journey, what advice would you give about starting out in music at an early age?

I wouldn't advise young producers since I'm still learning myself.
However, I can share what has helped me: consistent learning, a thirst for new content, and staying focused on creating music. One of the best tips from my parents is not to get too distracted, and I plan to follow this advice throughout my life. This has been incredibly helpful for me.



I try to keep my thoughts simple and avoid overthinking when producing, singing, or composing. I follow my instincts, and by God's grace, it results in a distinct sound. I aim to be original, experiment, and create music that makes sense and has a unique taste.





## FROM FOLK ROOTS TO CONTEMPORARY HITS Crafting Timeless Music for Every Generation

Growing up, you listened to many different styles of music, but folk had a profound impact on you. What was it about folk music that resonated so deeply with you?

Folk music is something that has been passing on from generation to generation. The melody was so simple, had a rawness and easily resonated with every age group. The lyrics have a conversation in the local dialect especially in Punjabi folk music.

## Your debut song, "Naah Goriye" was a huge hit. Can you tell us more about the inspiration behind this song and its creation process?

Naah Goriye is a song from movie Bala. The song is written by Jaani Sir. I just started off with my journey and somehow Jaani Sir got to hear my vocals through social media, we had a meeting, sang few scratches and song was dubbed the next day. The whole process was so fast, keeping me unaware that this dub was for the movie. A week later I was informed that the song had been roped into the movie and I felt blessed and happy.

## You blend classical Hindustani music with modern pop and rock. How do you approach balancing these traditional and contemporary elements in your music?

I had my classical music training under Pt. Shri Channu ji Maharaj & Meeta pandit. The new generation, or as we call them Gen Z, does not love or resonate with traditional or classical music much, and hence juggling with various styles, this blend of roots + contemporary is being loved by millions around.

In my songs you'll find the element of this modern soundscape in my devotional creations, making them cross hundreds of millions of views across socials and Youtube.

## How did your training in classical Hindustani vocal music shape your approach to songwriting and performing?

It strengthened the roots, the source for every musical creation on earth is Ragas. Practicing them, knowing them opens the whole new spectrum that you can explore while creating new music.

You can experiment only when you have in-depth knowledge of classical music, and my talent helps me a lot both in my live performances and songwriting process.

## You play multiple instruments, including the guitar and harmonium. How does being a multi-instrumentalist influence the way you compose and arrange your songs?

These instruments make the process of songwriting interesting, if you are not able to hunt something or get a creative block

at least you can hum the songs you love along with a guitar.

These musical instruments are my companion, friend and, in fact, partners who co-compose as per my imagination. You get to know the chord progressions as per the mood of the song if you are well versed in playing these instruments. The frequency spectrum of every instrument differs; the arrangement process gets easier as you are aware of what sound you wish to achieve in your compositions and creations.

You've performed at some of the biggest venues in India. Which particular performance do you recollect that stands out to you as a defining moment in your career?

My recent performance of about a week back stands fresh in my memory. I headlined Braj Mahotsav with 10,000+ audience singing along with me. That was a devotional concert in the birth land of Shri Krishna, Mathura attended by CM of UP & many dignitaries. It's always a blissful moment when I can vibe with my listeners.

Are there any specific themes or messages you aim to convey through your music, especially given your blend of traditional and contemporary sounds?

The honesty of my art is reflected in my songs, I don't aim for virality or trending genres. I aim for eternal music and melody

creations which people can put in their playlist and listen to at any point of time to feel happy.

Being based in Mumbai, a city known for its vibrant music, culture and art, how does the urban yet diverse environment influence your music?

The cityscapes no longer influence music these days. Since the advent of digital literacy and people's increased use of social media, the norms are changing. The major influence is digital consumption these days. You can listen to diverse genres round the clock with just a click now.

But there has to be something unique in your art that can make you stand out from the oceans of musicians and artists. Social media has made everyone an artist these days, the entry has become so easy actually, but survival, sustenance and relevance in the changing times are the real points to focus on. For that you need to be honest with your art, the learning and effort should never stop.



#### ZACK KNIGHT

# CRAFTING GLOBAL SOUNDS Fusing Cultures, Chart-Topping Hits and a Passion for Music

## Growing up in Grimsby with a Punjabi mother and Afro-Asian father, how did your cultural background influence the unique style of music you create?

My cultural background influenced my unique style of music because my cultural background is unique. Growing up, this gave me access to a diverse range of music. While listening to different types of music, I was able to appreciate the differences and the nuances of them all. When applying these principles to my music, I was able to use the parts of each type of music I liked to create my own unique sound.

You describe your sound as "R&B infused with a crossover sound" that blends Bollywood and Middle Eastern influences. How do you approach combining these distinct elements in your music?

I actually don't directly think about separating each aspect of the different sounds in my music. I go with what comes out melodically and what I'm feeling. This means that I can start off with a western sound but change it halfway through the process to make it sound more Bollywood or Middle Eastern. Basically, I let the lyrics write themselves and the music play itself. Then I polish it up by following my intuition and letting the music flow.

#### With Usher, Boyz II Men, and Michael Jackson as your early inspirations, how did international music shape your style?

International music played an instrumental role in shaping my style. Like I said earlier, listening to artists from different sides of the world gave me a broader listening experience and exposed me to different types and styles of music. Each type of music has

distinct elements that I have had an opportunity to appreciate. It was this appreciation that allowed elements from all these types of music to influence my own style.

## You've written for well-known artists like Tinie Tempah, Ginuwine, and IYAZ. How do you identify the creative process of your fellow collaborators during the process?

What is more important to me than the creative process of my collaborators is their integrity. I appreciate when my collaborators are serious about their music and are dedicated like me. This ensures they have passion for the craft, which is half the battle in the creative process. I also appreciate when my collaborators have a good track record, which indicates that not only are they serious about the music, but also that they are principled and ethical people. These are the types of people with whom I want to work. Lastly, I like





Performing on stage also gives me direct feedback, so I can see what works and what doesn't - basically, what resonates with audiences and what doesn't. It's also a good way to test music and see how it impacts audiences. It's like having the best, most supportive focus group and getting instant feedback!

my collaborators to have a substantial topic for me to write about. This gives substance to my music. Having substance and depth in my music is important to me, and I don't like to write songs that have no meaning or can't resonate with the audience.

## You're one of the few artists who produces, composes, and engineers your own music. What drives you to keep control over each step of the music creation process?

I think the biggest thing that drives me to control each step of the music creation process is my endless passion for music.
Creating music is what I'm most passionate about, so it's easy for me to immerse myself in every aspect of the music creation process. It doesn't feel like work at all. I'm also a perfectionist and like everything to be just so. So, it stands to reason that I would want that level of perfection for the one thing I'm the most passionate about: Music.

## Your success in both the Asian and mainstream UK charts is impressive. How do you approach creating music that appeals to such diverse audiences?

Thank you for your kind words. I don't have a specific approach for creating music that appeals to diverse audiences. I make music that appeals to me, and if there are people out there like me, then I hope they will like it too. Like I said earlier, I make music that resonates with me. Since I do it so passionately, I hope for that emotion to pass into my music. Music transcends languages and cultures and becomes a bonding agent of its own, and I think it's this universality that helps my music appeal to people from different corners of the world.

With opportunities to perform at venues like Wembley and the 02, how does performing on such big stages influence your perspective on music and your connection with fans?

Performing on stage influences my perspective on music and my connection with fans in many ways. It always helps to see my fans' reactions in real-time. Since making music can be an isolating process, it's a blessing to see fans' reactions in real-time instead of reading comments online or hearing reviews post-release. Performing on stage also gives me direct feedback, so I can see what works and what doesn't - basically, what resonates with audiences and what doesn't. It's also a good way to test music and see how it impacts audiences. It's like having the best, most supportive focus group and getting instant feedback!

You've achieved six top 5 singles in the Asian charts and two Top 10 singles in the UK mainstream charts so far. What do these achievements mean to you, and how do you set new goals after reaching such milestones?

First of all, I want to say that I am incredibly grateful for each fan,

whether they come to my shows or listen to my music alone in their room. I'm also so grateful for my family, who has supported me wholeheartedly throughout my journey. Everything I do is for you. So, when I do achieve things like top singles on a chart, it makes me feel pride and happiness that I created music that resonates with people so heavily. Knowing I helped to spread joy in the world or helped brighten someone's day is what gives me purpose. The accolades that come with it are just a tangible reminder of this.

I basically set new goals for myself by always challenging myself to do better than I have done before. I want to continue growing, evolving, and learning and never want to become complacent. There is always something to learn and some way to grow, so I set my goals in pursuit of this growth.

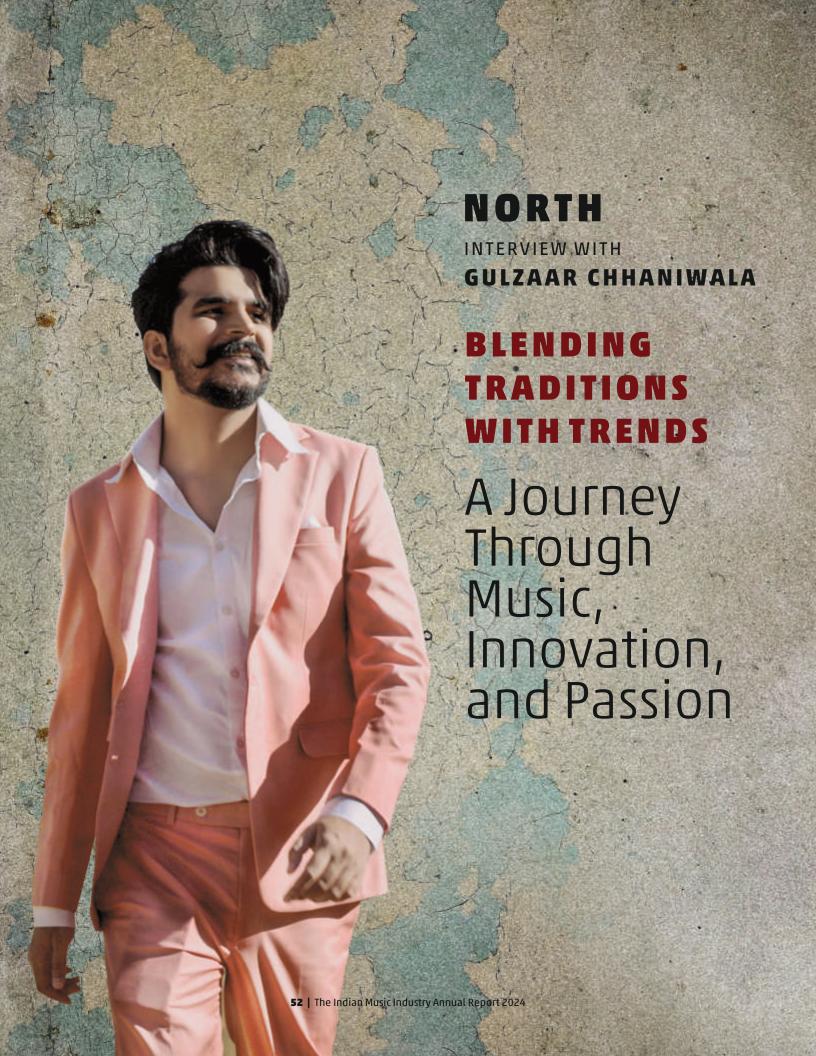
#### With a degree in the field of Economics, how does the subject influence the way you approach your music career?

Studying economics helps me understand the financial side of music-making. It gives me a deeper and more intuitive understanding. It also means I can navigate my own finances without having to outsource the work.

#### With such a range of musical and cultural influences around you, where do you look for inspiration when you're starting a new project?

My inspiration when starting a new project comes from other artists, what people say, my friends' experiences, my own experiences, and my own heartbreaks and losses. Essentially, I want my music to have substance, so the inspiration for my music comes from what I see other people go through, what I go through, and which life experiences move me. I feel that if there is a certain experience I can relate to, then someone else in the world must also be able to relate to it. And if I can help someone with my music, or give someone something to relate to, my purpose is fulfilled. In this way, I'm able to take life experiences - my friends' and my own - and make them inspiration for my music.





You began your music career writing Punjabi songs before transitioning to Haryanvi music. What inspired this shift, and how has it influenced your musical style?

During my time in Punjab, the integration of the dhol into urban music motivated me to bring Haryana's traditional ghadiya or ghatam instrument to urban youth through fusion music, addressing a gap in Haryana's urban music scene, which previously lacked youth-oriented music. I experimented with trap genre fusion using the ghadiya instrument in Faad Faad, which received positive feedback, and subsequently incorporated it into my hit song Filter Shot, leading to numerous successful hits that introduced the ghadiya to a young urban audience.

You are not only a singer but also a lyricist, music producer, and director. How do you leverage the skills that you gained through such diverse experience across the board?

Coming from a middle-class family with no musical background, I received no financial support for my musical passion, so I took matters into my own hands. Music and video directors' high fees prompted me to learn everything myself. Initially, I only wrote songs, but when no one showed interest in singing them, I decided to sing too. This lack of resources

transformed me, Gulzaar Chhaniwala, into a one-man army.

Your song FAAD FAAD went viral and received a great response from your fans. Can you take us back to that moment and share the process behind creating such a hit?

Faad Faad holds a special place among my productions, as it marked my entry into the industry, and its innovative blend of ghadiya with urban music, combining traditional folk ragini and modern mafia song elements with ghadiya trap beats, captivated listeners.

Many of your songs have achieved massive popularity on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. What trends do you see in terms of social media and popularity of Haryanvi music amongst a wider audience?

Haryanvis are renowned for their lively and attitude-filled language, which exudes joy and attracts people, making them eager to listen to Haryanvi songs that boost their mood and energy.

Coming from Bhiwani, Haryana, how has your hometown influenced your music and your connection with fans?

My upbringing in Bhiwani, Haryana, deeply rooted me in the local culture and everyday life, motivating me to craft songs that genuinely capture my community's experiences, values and daily struggles. How do you come up with the themes and stories in your songs and are there any particular experiences that inspire your lyrics?

My storytelling obsession was so intense that I actually read entire chapters in school instead of just cramming answers, which paid off when I could recall crazy-detailed narratives and ace exams. This all started in the 6th grade when I made goofy movie parodies, but now I'm hooked on crafting characters that'll make readers swoon. When writing song lyrics, I'm all about building a killer narrative and characters that'll stick in people's heads – I want my songs to be legendary for both lyrics and characters that resonate.

You are currently studying in college while also making music. How do you balance your academic responsibilities with your music career?

Music is my passion, while my studies enable me to explore and deepen my understanding of it, making both equally essential to my life.







## REGIONAL TRENDS

#### EAST

INTERVIEW WITH

PALLAB GHOSH

The Story Behind Gappu Instruments

Pallab Ghosh is the co-founder of Gappu Instruments, a Kolkata-based company specializing in crafting unique percussion instruments with an emphasis on Indian craftsmanship and quality. With a mission to bring Indian brands to the global stage, Pallab and his team aim to blend tradition and innovation, creating instruments that resonate with musicians worldwide. This interview dives into Gappu's journey, product innovation, and the broader vision for India's music industry.

#### What was the vision behind forming Gappu?

Gappu's journey began in early 2019. The idea came from my co-founder Anirban Bhattacharya and his father, Mr. Dalal Bhattacharya, who has over 30 years of experience in the musical instrument industry in Kolkata. Anirban, a drummer, wanted to create something unique, breaking away from the trend of merely copying Western brands.

Initially, we focused on developing percussion instrument cajón—a Peruvian instrument popularized globally. I joined the venture in 2020, and together we envisioned Gappu as a brand offering quality Indian instruments with global appeal. Our mission is to provide Indian musicians with top-notch, locally crafted instruments and ultimately, introduce them to the international stage.



That's a commendable vision. Could you elaborate on your manufacturing process and how you cater to the evolving demands of the music industry? How do you incorporate industry feedback into your instrument manufacturing process?

Absolutely. Our manufacturing process emphasizes innovation and sustainability. For example, we've adapted traditional materials to make our percussion instruments more accessible and user-friendly. Unlike learning to play the guitar or piano, our instruments are intuitive and don't require extensive training - just a sense of rhythm.

We've also collaborated with leading musicians like Pandit Bikram Ghosh, Sambit Chatterjee, and Subhen Chatterjee. We closely collaborated with musicians from South India, Mumbai, and beyond. Their playing experience has been complementing our manufacturing expertise, enabling us to create superior products. Their feedback has been invaluable in refining our products.

Our latest innovation integrates electronic components into our instruments, adding versatility for modern musicians. A new model

launched this December features such advancements.

#### What role does Gappu play in music education in India?

We actively promote music education through our website and YouTube channel. We consistently publish blogs on our website https://gappu.co/tutorials and product guides on our YouTube Channel

https://www.youtube.com/channe l/UCGwWk1iMHE4wEVQDaag1xLA targeting various musicians - from guitarists to percussionists. This has helped raise awareness about lesser-known instruments and fostered a community around them.

#### Gappu has seen an impressive 100% growth over the past year. What factors do you think were most instrumental in driving this remarkable expansion?

Our relentless hunger for growth and our commitment to building a global Indian brand has driven our success. The Indian market is saturated with international brands, but we aim to change that by offering high-quality, locally made products.

Which markets have been observing increasing demand for instruments according to you?

Our strongest markets are South India and the northeast where musical instruments are in high demand. We are now exploring North India to expand further.

#### How does Gappu ensure instrument manufacturing keeping in mind environmental sustainability?

We are conscious of our environmental impact. Two years ago, we launched a tree-planting initiative, planting one tree for every 10 instruments sold. We plan to increase this by re-thinking our initiative to ensure planting one tree for every five instruments sold going forward.

#### What are your long-term goals in the music manufacturing sector?

We aim to showcase our craftsmanship on the global stage at major musical instrument expos such as the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), an annual trade show in USA. Our mission is to establish Gappu as a globally recognized Indian brand, not just for exports but for international distribution as well. We want Gappu to be synonymous with Indian innovation and quality, inspiring musicians worldwide. Expanding our product line, improving accessibility, and building a global presence remain our top priorities.



Our manufacturing process emphasizes innovation and sustainability. For example, we've adapted traditional materials to make our percussion instruments more accessible and user-friendly.



How has your experience in Tamil media publishing and printing influenced your approach to supporting and preserving musical heritage, especially traditional and classical Indian music?

Despite advancements in technology and the rise of artificial intelligence, the art of publishing books especially Tamil books is still the same. Loving books and printing the same is a great art work. Tamil Nadu is deeply rooted in art, culture and tradition. However, due to technological advancements, people, young and old, are increasingly engrossed in mobiles and laptops.

The sudden transformation initially posed challenges, but according to my experience, people regardless of age, young or old, feel more for truthful human relationship and

thirst for the same. Small children from the age of 3 onwards have started to perform in the field of music and dance, keeping traditions alive. Sounds of music are reverberating. Sath yuga has begun.

Given your background in producing educational materials on mantras and conducting poojas or rituals, how do you see the role of music in spiritual and educational contexts?

MB PUBLISHERS is renowned for creating pictorial pooja books with instructions and illustrations. When music complements rituals be it through bell ringing, singing of bajans or chanting of Vedas, it elevates the experience. Music and books go hand in hand and pairing recorded albums with books will certainly complement performing pooja and will enthuse the performer with divinity.

Are there any specific initiatives or publications from MB Publishers that focus on the intersection of music and culture, such as traditional chants or musical texts?

Yes, I am really planning to create a book embedded with a chip that can play chants or music. It would provide immense support to practitioners. I am currently looking for developers and vendors to bring this concept to life.

How do you think printed materials, like transliteration books and pooja guides, contribute to sustaining musical traditions across generations?

Transliteration of all texts of any language to English or regional language is a must. It allows singers, writers and artists to read and understand the material comfortably, as if it were in their native language.

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MB PUBLISHERS is renowned for creating pictorial pooja books with instructions and illustrations. When music complements rituals be it through bell ringing, singing of bajans or chanting of Vedas, it elevates the experience.



With the rise of spiritual tourism, particularly inbound tourism, what trends have you observed in the demand for traditional and spiritual music? Additionally, as someone closely associated with cultural materials, do you see an increasing interest in resources that integrate music with other art forms? Is this a direction you are considering exploring further?

This world is full of materialistic needs. No one becomes completely happy even after reaching their respective goals. True bliss comes only through connecting with the supreme

power or God. Resources like divine music and step by step pooja performing guides becomes handy, especially where priests are not available. These types of books replace absent gurus, without much difficulty, allowing the traditions to be learned and followed by succeeding generations.

While I cannot definitively say demand is increasing, but awareness is certainly improving. Media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp and Reels have made short informational videos on music popular. Unfortunately, reading habits have declined.

How do you collaborate with musicians, musicologists or cultural organizations to develop resources that preserve and promote traditional music?

Collaborations happen primarily through satsangs and networking with intellectuals. Indian music is sung, followed and respected by many foreign nations. The depth and discipline are helping the tradition grow more beautifully.





## What role does music play in the community-focused training programs you offer through the MB Charity and Educational Trust?

My goal was to establish a music institute for the visually impaired. Unfortunately, due to COVID and business losses, this plan is withheld for the time being. However, editing, singing and dubbing are great interesting factors that will uplift their minds. I hope I will find the right people and resources to accomplish this goal soon.

## What can the Government of India do to promote Spiritual Music Tourism across India? Likewise, what should the government of Tamil Nadu do to promote Spiritual Music Tourism?

Both the central and Tamil Nadu state governments should institute awards to great intellects and preserve our heritage by conducting programs and appreciating all the contributors who have upheld spiritualism in our country since time immemorial.

#### Where do you see spiritual music in its original form 5 years from now?

In five years, music will be globalized. There will be no distinctions like "Indian music" or "Indian musician". Instead, music and musicians will transcend geographical boundaries. Media platforms have already unified audiences globally, bringing all together on one page.



## NORTH SAMANVII DIGIMEDIA

# REVIVING PHYSICAL VINYL SALES OF MUSIC IN INDIA

Insights from Mr. Saji Pillai



Mr. Saji Pillai is the Managing Director of Samanvii Digimedia Art and Solutions (DAAS), India's first vinyl manufacturing company based in Navi Mumbai. Samanvii also provides the disc manufacturing services and packaging services, as a strategic partner to companies across the globe.

In this engaging discussion, Mr. Saji Pillai, a seasoned leader in the vinyl manufacturing industry, delves into his journey, the challenges in setting up the manufacturing plant and his vision to enable the promising future of music vinyl records. From employment generation to sustainability, Mr. Pillai's insights shed light on the resurgence of vinyl and its impact on the music ecosystem. Here are the highlights of the interview.



Mr. Pillai, thank you for joining us. During the introduction you mentioned vinyl manufacturing creates employment. Could you share how your operations contribute to employment opportunities?

Our operations have created significant employment opportunities across various roles. Our pressing operators, for instance, are highly experienced, many having transitioned from CD and DVD manufacturing. Additionally, we employ electrical and electronics engineers, logistics specialists and an extensive packaging team - primarily women - responsible for manual inspection and packaging. In total, our packaging division alone employs about 100 people.

Vinyl manufacturing is a very niche area of work which requires a very particular set of expertise and skills. What kind of expertise do you look for when expanding your workforce, and how do you train them?

We primarily hire electrical and electronics engineers, along with diploma holders for technical requirements. Our thirty plus years experienced senior technical team trains incoming extended family members of Samanvii rigorously. This mentorship ensures they adapt seamlessly to our operational needs.

Could you describe the quality control measures in place during vinyl production to meet international standards, and how does the standard meet demands by music labels looking for premium vinyl products?

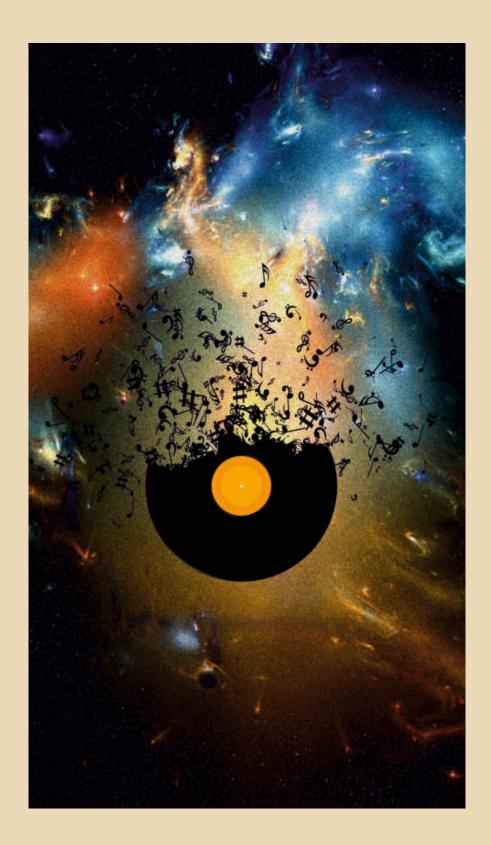
Quality is our cornerstone. We leverage advanced European technology for processes such as precise pressing with tight tolerances to minimize surface noise, considering the amount of noise pollution that is taking place.

How do you position Samanvii to meet the quality expectations of international labels and collectors? What measures do you take to ensure this?

Our records consistently weigh over 180 grams and undergo stringent 100% defect inspections. We maintain the international standards in manufacturing by sourcing very high-quality stampers from Europe.

Vinyl is making a strong comeback in India. How do you anticipate this format expanding beyond niche markets? What trends are you seeing in vinyl demand domestically? Are there any specific genres or artists that drive sales in India?

We cater to two primary groups: collectors who value analog sound and tactile experiences and younger audiences, aged 13 to 35, rediscovering vinyl. By maintaining high quality and appealing designs, we bridge the gap between these diverse segments. Coming to trends domestically, initially Indian classics dominated the vinyl market. However, the younger demographic's interest has spurred demand for indie artists and diverse genres. As domestic manufacturing has allowed for shortening of vinyl production timelines from a staggering six to nine months waiting period to a mere six weeks, it has enabled us to diverse the genres significantly.



## Do you foresee vinyl production in India growing to serve more global markets and are there specific regions where you plan to expand export activities?

Absolutely. We've partnered with a European distributor to promote Indian music abroad. This not only benefits artists like Diljit Dosanjh, who have a global fanbase, but also positions Indian vinyl as a competitive export product.

#### Vinyl production can be resourceintensive. Are there any ecofriendly practices or initiatives you're implementing to reduce environmental impact?

Sustainability is a priority. Our plant employs energy-efficient processes, closed-loop chillers to conserve water. We are also in the business of packaging, and we only use recycled materials for packaging. We are in the process of exploring bio-friendly vinyl alternatives to cater to create a

positive impact on environment while still making the vinyl ecosystem grow.

#### What challenges do you face as a vinyl manufacturer in India?

Material sourcing is our biggest hurdle, as PVC, stampers and labels are all imported. However, we plan to establish a stamper manufacturing facility domestically, which will reduce costs and enhance scalability. Logistics remains another challenge, but strategic partnerships are helping us address this. This way Samanvii is also creating employment.

## How does the presence of India's first vinyl pressing plant impact the broader music trade ecosystem, including retailers, labels and event organizers?

A domestic vinyl manufacturing plant accelerates vinyl releases, revives retail networks and makes

vinyl more accessible. This creates new revenue streams for labels, artists and retailers, fostering a renewed interest in consuming music via physical mode.

## Are there regions in India where vinyl consumption is particularly strong? How can vinyl launches enhance music promotions?

The market for vinyl is still booming and presently as per our sales data, Kerala leads the chart due to its deep appreciation for music listening through traditional methods. North India, especially Delhi, is also a growing market. In the past, standalone events were organized for music launches. However, now the vinyl has the potential to become a key promotional tool, akin to cassette and CD launches as part of music launch events, creating buzz and offering the consumers a memorable collectors' item.



# IMI INSIGHTS 67 | The Indian Music Industry Annual Report 2024

#### 2024 IFPI Content Protection and Enforcement Seminar, Budapest

SEPTEMBER 10, 2024



The discussion on subject "Poly-criminality and alternative grounds for tackling piracy" was moderated by Melissa Morgia, Director of Global Content Protection and Enforcement at IFPI with a panel featuring Alejandro Musso, Cybercrime Prosecutor at the Special Prosecutor's Unit for Cybercrime Investigation (UFEIC) within the Ministry of Public Argentina; Jenil Shah, Manager of Legal Affairs for the Indian Music Industry; and Paulo Batimarchi, Regional Head of Content Protection and Enforcement for Latin America and the Caribbean at the IFPI Latin America Regional Office.



#### IMI Participation at GNLU-WBNUJS Open Dialogue

APRIL 26 & 27, 2024

An open dialogue "Connecting the dots between copyright and sustainable development goals: a roadmap for copyright societies" jointly organized by DPIIT IPR Chairs of Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) & The West Bengal National University of Juridical Science (WBNUJS).

On the occasion of the World IP Day 2024, the dialogue was on the theme "IP and SDGs: Building our common future with innovation and creativity" and focused on the role of Collective Management Organisations (CMOs) in achieving sustainable development goals. The forum re-emphasized the key role collective management of rights in striking a balance between protection of rights holders and access to creative works to public at large, as a result, sustaining innovation and creativity.

#### IMI Participation at the 12th Annual Edition of World IP Forum

JANUARY 10TH 2024



The panel on "Copyright in the Digital Era" focused on key issues and concerns affecting the Media & Entertainment industry, including online piracy, risks associated with generative AI and the weak enforcement framework for copyright societies. The discussion highlighted the urgent need for stronger measures to protect the interests of creators and rightsholders, ensuring that their rights are safeguarded in an increasingly digital landscape.





#### **About IMI**

The Indian Music Industry (IMI) is the apex body that represents the interest of the music companies a.k.a. record labels on a pan-India basis. IMI is an IFPI affiliate which is the global body that represents the recorded music industry worldwide. Rightsholders including domestic and international music labels form part of this association. IMI is the leading force in India's fight against music piracy and safeguard IP rights of its stakeholders.

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