

Article

S.R. Ashok Kumar

Making Music in Australia: Music Director Sathosh Narayanan



Music director Santhosh Narayanan is a man of few words. He does not show off. When we call him, he himself will pick up the phone and he is a simpleton. In his career of 8 years he has completed more than 30 films and still going strong. His first feature film was *Attakathi*, which was released in 2012, and he has scored music for many blockbuster films and to mention two of the super star Rajinikanth films, *Kabali* and *Kaala*. His first OTT (Over the top) release was *Penquin*, which was released in June. He has half dozen films ready for release soon.

Younger Days

Santhosh Narayanan is fond of cricket and music from his younger days. After finishing his school education, he studied B.E. Computer Science at JJ College of Engineering and Technology, Trichy and his attraction towards music increased during the college days and he learned flute from Murali Krishnan, Trichy. For his friend's sake he learned keyboard and they started a group to win trophies at Inter College music competitions. His quest for music was so intense that he discarded a very

good Job offer from a software giant company and persuaded an advanced course at "School of Audio Engineering" (SAE), a world leader, in sound and audio engineering, based in Chennai. During his spare time, he would compose a Jingle or advertisement or publish an audio CD. His title song for a Tamil serial *Kalli Kattu Pallikoodam* and background music for Tamil serial *En Peyar Meenakshi* and the *World Peace Album* are worth mentioning.

The SAE course offered him an opportunity to get in touch with some of the great musicians of the time namely Sasi Kiran, Sowmya, Ravi Kiran, Sri Ram and music director Praveen Mani. These stalwarts shaped and molded him as a musician by timely inputs and course correction that were needed. In 2011, the turning moment came in the form of a national award for *Advaitam* as 'The best educational movie' for which Santhosh Narayanan has composed the music.

Entering Filmdom

In a 20-minute Telugu short film, the 2 tracks of 8- and 5-minutes duration each have cre-

ated certain positive impact that film makers started to focus their attention to have him as a composer for their movies. Consequently, he composed music for a set of Tamil movies, namely *Atta Kathi*, *Pizza*, *Soodhu Kavvum*, *Pizza II*, *The Villa* and *Cuckoo*. One can see *Jigirthanda*, which he scored was a box office hit. When asked the young composer why suddenly Australia he said that the studio 301 is one of the best in the world. "My first visit to Sydney, Australia was in 2006 for a musical event "Raga Maliga" along with singers Pradeep and Saindhavi. The secret of my melodious and catchy songs can be attributed to Studio 301 of Sydney, Australia. The experts here refine the already recorded tracks and add orchestral tracks if additionally needed at relevant notes of the movie. Another point is that with the present-day technology the recording is done live with the vocalist in one country and the composer in another far-off place."



On the first day in Australia

Music is divine and it is always an enriching one. I now also remember the day; I was to record a piece for my score that I was to go to the recording theatre at about 10 a.m. I left my room where I was staying before nine as it is only a walk able distance. As I knew the route I started walking and at one point I missed my way and was half an hour late to the recording. I felt sorry for coming late and told them that it was because of my missing the way. But they were all happy when I gave them the score and finished the recording in no time.

From my first film *Attakathi* I am working with them only and mainly it is the Studio 301, which has seen some of the best musicians in the world and the films of Peter Jackson were

done here only. The mastering engineers Leon Zervos and Steve Smart have worked with some of the greats in the music industry such as Micheal Jackson, Lady Gaga and others.

Phil Hartl, the concert master, who is a Grammy award winning violinist and his wife Corlie Hartl, who owns the orchestra were very helpful in finding the musicians, whom I want. I was also happy to work with Graham Jessie, the legendary Saxophone player who was part of the music for some of my films. I am now shuttling between Sydney and Chennai and working with these wonderful people.



It has become a regular for me to work or master my work in the Studio 301 with these people. I felt that it is an honor for me to work with them. From *Pizza* to *Cuckoo*, the journey was not only rewarding but was also enjoying myself in the world of music. For *Cuckoo* it was live orchestra and for *Jigirdanda* it was all electronic music. I normally do music as the films needs. I felt that *Cuckoo* needs live music and I worked hard for it. In *Jigirdanda* I felt that the film wanted electronic music, so I decided to go and record music from different parts of the world. I was sitting in the studio 301 and would record music in Chennai, New York and in Australia or any other part of the world. Sydney has become my second home and I used to go there very often.

I have half dozen films in my kitty, and I do not accept more films as I do not want my producer to wait for me. Till now the going is right and the songs and the background

score are all appreciated by music lovers all over the world. As my passion for music is enormous, I will refine and fine tune the score several times before convincing myself that the score is worthy for inclusion.” Santhosh Narayanan’s admirable composers in Tam-

il are M.S. Viswanathan, Ilaiyaraja and AR Rahman. His hobbies are Cricket and Chess. When asked when he would be leaving to Australia, he coolly said, “let this Covid-19 be over, I will buy the ticket to Australia”.

Mr. S.R. Ashok Kumar is a Member of Fipresci-India, based in Chennai.