

# Satyajit Ray's signature scores

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Satyajit Ray needs no introduction. But not many knew about his musical side, writes Ranjan Das Gupta. Ranjan Das Gupta



From scripting, sketching his characters, designing costume to directing and composing background scores, Satyajit Ray mastered them all. He earned the distinction of being among the top ten directors of the world in the last century.

The filmmaker would have turned 93 on May 2. Here is a glimpse of a facet that shows his versatility. Ray's music was not only widely appreciated but also set trends. In his earlier films, such as the 'Apu' Trilogy, 'Devi,' 'Jalsaghar' and 'Paras Pathar,' Ray worked with

maestros Ravi Shankar, Vilayat Khan and Ali Akbar Khan. Being influenced by earlier experiments of Chetan Anand and K.A. Abbas, Ray worked wonders with each maestro. He redefined the concept of background scores in films with amazing musical knowledge and restraint, creating the necessary impact.

He formed an ideal combination with Ravi Shankar. To an extent, Ray discovered his musical soul in the sitar maestro. The latter went on record to say, innumerable times, that Ray was the greatest director he had worked with. No doubt, the scores for 'Pather Panchali,' 'Aparajito,' 'Apur Sansar' and 'Paras Pathar' were mind-blowing. Ray even wrote a script for a documentary on Ravi Shankar. Sadly, he could not complete shooting it.

Vilayat Khan created excellent background tunes for 'Jalsaghar,' depicting the decaying Bengali zamindari system. However, the sitar maestro did not see eye to eye with Ray regarding certain matters. He resented the fact that Ray did not allow him to score independently. Ray's experience with Ali Akbar Khan in 'Devi' was even worse. Though 'Devi' boasts an unforgettable score, Ali Akbar Khan was not satisfied working with Ray. He accused Ray of too much interference and even doubted Ray's knowledge of Indian classical music.

The thorough gentleman that he was, Ray never bore any grudge against them nor commented about them. Instead, he decided to compose music for his films. Ray felt that though the maestros were matchless musicians, they had limitations in composing for films.

'Teen Kanya,' based on three of Tagore's short stories, saw the birth of Ray, the music director.

Since then, he never relied on any other composer. Ray mastered western notations. Till his immortal allegory, 'Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen,' Ray composed all his scores following the occidental musical

notes. Then he discovered that the musicians in Bengal were not accustomed to western notations. It took them time to convert the notations to Indian, especially Bengali ones. So, Ray learnt and started composing in Bengali notations. The results were fabulous.

‘Aranyer Din Ratri,’ ‘Pratidwandi,’ ‘Seemabaddha,’ ‘Jana Aranya’ and all his later films saw Ray, the composer, at his best. He initially composed his tunes on the piano. For his background scores, Ray mainly used violins, cellos, double bass guitars and the Indian bamboo flute. He gave importance to various Indian percussions and brilliantly used the timpani, a western drum, on certain occasions.

In ‘Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen’ and ‘Hirak Rajar Deshe,’ Ray opted for singer Anup Ghosal to render immortal numbers such as ‘Dekho Re Nayan Mele,’ ‘Ek Je Chilo Raja’ and ‘Mora Dujanee Rajar Jamai.’ He had also used the Carnatic style of music and instruments in these films.

Kishore Kumar rendered flawlessly the Tagore number, ‘Ami Chini Go Chini Tomare’ (I Know Of You) in ‘Charulata’ without the support of musical instruments. Ray had also lent his baritone for singing a couple of lines in his last directional venture, ‘Agantuk.’

Iconic composer Maurice Jarre described Ray’s music as haunting and soul stirring. Though he passed away 23 years ago, Ray’s music still creates harmonious ripples.

A masterpiece turns 60

In its 60th year, 2015, ‘Pather Panchali,’ the restored version by Academy Of Motion Pictures and Creation Films, will be screened on May 4 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the same venue where it had been shown 60 years ago, and again, in the ‘Classic’ section at the Cannes Film Festival.

Reference:

<https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/satyajit-rays-signature-scores/article7157997.ece>