

Festive Times

by Viraf Pocha

Ganpati has gone by. Dussehra and Diwali as well. So many regional festivals in between. Each with their own traditions. Homes will be cleaned. Things will be polished and painted over. Outfits brought down, or new ones tailored. Kitchens will be filled with ingredients. Setting off a flurry of activity.

Fun for everyone. Work that will gladly be embraced and the whole family getting together to just give thanks and celebrate each other.

For me personally it is a time of wonder. Just a few years ago we had to go through crazy loops to bring in light and sound equipment to support and reinforce our live events.

Every piece of equipment carried a story of ingenuity of how it was sourced and then brought back to India. How we fitted all the diverse pieces, things sometimes did not fit and we had to resort to *jugaad* and sometimes raw thuggery or pathetic pleading to get everything to work together.

I remember **Alyque Padamsee** climbing onto stage after each performance of *Evita* and while engaging with the audience run his hand below the mike to show there was no cable. That the lack of microphone cables did not mean the performers were miming but that the mikes were transmitting wirelessly to the sound desk. There was that one show that the governor of Maharashtra showed up for with his police escort and our rudimentary transmitters actually picked up chatter from his police escort vans.

We could all have been arrested and thrown into jail. Fortunately, the Governor was on hand to vouch for our authenticity and the show went

on. Monday, we had to show up at the Police Commissioners office and made to sign all kinds of statements. Our microphones were confiscated. And someone was dispatched to London to bring in UHF mikes in time for the next shows. The Police Commissioner was invited. He claimed to have loved the show, but was put out because our radio systems were more sophisticated than his.

Today – every one of Mumbai's Ganpati *mandaps* boast of music systems far superior to what we had installed. Cordless mikes have become commonplace. We had three on *Evita*. Plus, a standby cabled mike for emergencies.

Stage Lighting – We had a set of 'Gol Gappa' Rheostat Dimmers. 4 operators x 2 hands. There was one cue that **Rags Khote** had to twirl with his foot as we were shorthanded.

Yes, we had audio visual too. Two Kodak Carousel Projectors with an operator crouched over them in the middle of the auditorium.

Look where we are today. TV screens and LED panels are used to guide people where to enter from. I'm too old to climb under speakers and lights these days – But hey today you have motors that can lift super heavy equipment just so high to enable techies to access controls in an 'ergonomic environment'. Look – they even wear gloves. Why did we not think of that while we were reg-

ularly electrocuting ourselves fairly regularly.

Today it's not uncommon to see systems thrive as large loaded on trucks and powered by Generators on trucks to roll down the city's roads.

By coincidence I was watching an interview that **David Gilmour** was giving about his experiences of his early recording days in **Abbey Road Studios**, London. Apparently in the early 1970's Abbey Road studios was at that time owned by EMI. Gilmour advised that Abbey Road studios replace their aging 4 Track spool recorders with 16 track recorders, by passing the 8-track generation. (coughing slightly) the bean counters won and they went 8 Track. But within a year began losing out work to studios offering 16 Track recording. So, they had to upgrade. All the 8 track machines were sent off to EMI's far flung studio network. That's how India got its first 8 Track machine apparently.

Just as studios started becoming in demand. Indian film industry realised the potency of well recorded songs carrying movies to box office success.

Of course there were hiccups. The great **R V Pundit** of CBS imported a state-of-the-art studio and installed it into the new World Trade Center, Cuffe Parade. Sadly, the studio did not do too well cause Indian ears were not ready to accept world class recording quality. They were too

used to the slightly tinny sound that sounded great on the aging theater **Altec Lansing** speakers and their cheap car cassette systems.

While EMI stayed faithful to Indian classical music – this opened the window for **Western Outdoor** to set up its iconic studio and cemented the great **Daman Sood** and **Avinash Oak** as the go to sound engineers of the day.

That story came full circle when **Feroz Khans** ground breaking *Qurbani's* songs were recorded in Abbey

Road studios.

Since those days Indian film music and pop music have gleefully adopted Indian street rhythms (or more correctly farm rhythms) set to contemporary lyrics. Bhangra beats. Followed closely by Maharashtra's Lavni Beat are everywhere.

Blasting away from loud sound systems installed in every street corner. Our courts and cops try hard to reign in that exuberance. Depending on where you live and how powerful the mandap lobby is – results vary.

But nobody can question how infectious the beat is. People may complain about the volume, but everybody has their feet tapping away to the rhythm.

That is the challenge facing studio engineers today. How to balance the heart tugging lyrics that most Indian songs fall into, over all our languages with a hard punchy beat that surrounds the listener.

Step into any mandap. Your senses are assaulted on every level. Layers upon layers of brightly coloured flowers and fabrics all lined with glittering strings of mirror, gold and silver.

The lights bright and hot add to the energy and release that we Indians bring to our devotion.

It must be Loud, Bright and In your face. Possibly the most intense being the pandals built to celebrate *Ma Kali* in Kolkata.

On that festive note let me wish all my friends in the event world, an expression of joy, exuberance and energy to carry into the new season. Blessings all!

