

Atlanta  
Dunya



## Asha Bhosle Sings for Raina Foundation's Charity

By Kavita Chhibber

*Photos : Vinod Devlia*

"I realized that giving is something that no one can take away from you. The rewards of giving go far beyond money and material things. Giving is something you will be able to take with you wherever you go for the rest of your life."

Perhaps the significance of these words by Robin Raina who heads the Raina Foundation, a

young charity, that has taken some mature and measured steps to bring hope and help to underprivileged children in India and other countries, is not lost on many celebrities. Many have adopted children supported by Raina Foundation, others like legendary Manna Dey and Shaan and now Asha Bhosle have gone one step ahead and lent their voice and immense talent to the cause by participating in shows hosted by the Foundation.

On 17 June at the gorgeous Fox Theater, Asha Bhosle enchanted a full house of ardent admirers along with her two very gifted male co-artists, Kumar Sanu and Sudesh Bhosle.



The evening began with a dance performance by the local dance troupe Silent Killers; it was followed by a dance depicting the positive and negative elements of water and the pain and destruction left by the Tsunami by students from Kumud Savla's Nrtiya Natya Kala Bharati Dance Academy.

Sudesh Bhosle then took center stage. This immensely talented singer who is also a gifted painter and mimic has become the singing voice of Amitabh Bachchan-so much so that when Bhosle sang a particular song in Bachchan's voice Jaya Bachchan refused to believe it was any one other than her husband who had sung the song. Bhosle regaled the audience with songs in the voices of Kishore Kumar, Rafi, S.D. and R. D Burman. K.L Sehgal, Hemant Kumar, Manna Dey and Amitabh Bachchan. He belted out popular numbers like Mere makhna, tum kya jaano, rang barse, ke pag ghungroo, Hai Apna Dil to Awara, Ai mere Pyare Watan, Tere Sajan Hain Us Paar, Zindagi ka safar and duets with Asha Bhosle that were delightful. It is amazing to see the range in his voice and his ability to pull this off since these singers have pretty dissimilar voices and distinct singing styles.

Sudesh Bhosle also sang the beautiful song Kehna Hai Kehna hai aaj tumse yeh pehli baar from Padosan and dedicated it to the memories of Kishore Kumar, R. D Burman, Mahmood, and Sunil Dutt. He also paid homage to Tsunami victims and talked of being familiar with the nostalgia NRIs feel when they are away from home and dedicated a couple of songs to the victims and those who miss their homeland.

Kumar Sanu took the world by storm when his songs from Ashiqui became block busters and never looked back. His voice is crystal clear, and he is charm personified on stage. Sanu also holds the Guinness record for recording the maximum number of songs-28 in a day.

Every song rendered by him whether it was Tum Dil ki Dhadkan mein rehte ho, or ek ladki ko dekha which netted him his first Filmfare award, Sanam Mere Humraaz, and the evergreen Sochege tumhe pyaar Karen ke nahin, dheere dheere se meri zindagi mein aana, do dil mil rahen hai magar chupke chupke, had the crowd roaring. Sanu was very effusive in his appreciation of the genius of R. D. Burman, and the work that Raina foundation does for underprivileged children, and for the Tsunami victims recently.

He was visibly overcome when Robin Raina told the audience that March 31st has been declared Kumar Sanu Day in Dayton Ohio.

Asha Bhosle then made her much awaited entry, resplendent in white. What never ceases to amaze is the stamina and charm of this 71 year young legend who I personally consider the greatest singer of our times. She can sing anything any other singer can sing, though I doubt anyone has her range and versatility even today.

It is also interesting how she brings in something fresh, something new in her presentation. The last time she was here in Atlanta with Adnan Sami she wowed the audience with her voice and presentation. This time too, her wit, her sense of humor, and the way she blends songs and story telling, sharing happy, mischievous, poignant memories from her life, had the audience spellbound. The way she moves with the times is just awe inspiring.

Asha began her segment, sharing memories of her life. The excerpts were set to the sultry number, Mera Naam Hai Shabnam from the hit film Kati Patang. Asha Bhosle's voice cut through the darkness as the lights honed in on her and two dancers with sinewy moves escorted her onstage. She continued crooning her life's story and how her faith in God pulled her through the tough times and the obstacles she faced in life.

This time along with weaving the magic of her music, she actually did a magic trick, where she made a half smoked cigarette disappear, in a little red handkerchief she whipped out, much to the delight of the little kids sitting in the audience.

She sang some old forgotten melodies, some hip numbers like kambakht ishq, Sharara Sharara and the current block buster Lucky lips.

Asha ji then shared some memories of her life and musical journey with R. D. Burman. She mentioned how he once just left for Nepal with her to get inspiration for a song. Watching the Nepalese girls go by humming a Nepali folk tune inspired him to come up with the lilting number Poocho Na yaar kya hua, dil ka karar kya hua. The crowd went wild when she started crooning Aaiye Meherban, dhal gaya din ho gayi shaam and mutu kodi kawadi hada with Sudesh Bhosle. Bhosle added his brand of mimicry switching to the voices of Raj Kumar and Ashok Kumar and later making sounds of the shuttle in dhal gaya din while singing in Rafi's voice.

Asha talked about Bhosle being a very talented painter to which he said, "it's too late to talk about my talents..alas I'm married," which cracked the audience up! The concert continued without a break and had Sudesh Bhosle singing one foot tapping hit after another that had the crowd dancing all over the auditorium. Asha Bhosle wearing a beautiful blue sari then walked over and lent her mellifluous voice to evergreen songs like reshmi salwar kurta jail da, kajra mohabbat wala and then Aa Dekhen zara with Sudesh Bhosle and Kumar Sanu as the grand finale.



The show ended abruptly much to the dismay of members of the audience, many of whom felt Kumar Sanu did not get enough time on stage. Others wanted to see Sudesh's stand up comedy and many others were clamoring to hear some more of Asha ji's popular golden oldies. Robin Raina said he had mentioned to Asha ji that he was honored to have her here and that they could continue for as long as they wanted, but she was concerned about the additional cost the foundation would incur if they went into overtime and decided not to continue.

The flip side was the amount of litter left by the audience. Food containers, spilt alcohol marred the interiors of the historic Fox theater, a shameful reminder of how filthy South Asians are. Robin said he was prepared for that and had already kept a cleaning budget aside. The Fox Theater is very anal about these things but perhaps let it go out of respect for Robin and the fact that it was a charity concert.

People kept on taking videos openly defying announcements to the contrary, until Robin had to stop the concert midway and appeal to every one to stop. Not that it deterred the people there. I guess because of these antics, gorgeous theaters like the Fox may be made inaccessible for future South Asian events. Maybe the best solution would be to prohibit food and liquor and check every one's bags for stuff like they do at most events. There were drunken catcalls and a brawl that was contained only because Robin intervened. He had requested Fox, not to post their Marshals as he wanted the concert to be a happy and positive experience for everyone. May be a reevaluation is needed in that area.

Robin Raina said that this show was a great learning experience for him. It was the biggest show the Raina Foundation had hosted to date and the most expensive, but the entire cost was covered through sponsorship. " While I'm very grateful to the national sponsors, I cannot even begin to tell you how much support I received at the local level, from local sponsors to selfless people like Mustafa Ajmeri, Sandeep and Kumud Savla and many others

who helped all the way. The volunteers from the Raina Foundation especially Aaron Tikkoo and Kallol Paul were amazing. Compared to them I did nothing.” Says Raina. Aaron disagrees, “A great deal of energy at Robin Raina Foundation flows from Robin’s passion and perseverance towards this cause and that’s what drives people like me. Robin is a true example of a leader leading by an example.”



A lot of people who come for such shows don’t see the blood, sweat and tears that go into not just hosting a show of this caliber by a Foundation whose head is not a professional promoter and has to learn the ropes by hands on experience.

Aaron Tikkoo says a great amount of a charitable organization's time and energy is devoted to fundraising and it holds true at Robin Raina Foundation as well. About 2 months back, at a Foundation meeting when Robin mentioned the idea of doing the Asha Bhosle show, no one knew how to react. “We had never done something of this size before and it took some time for us to digest the fact that we just have two months to accomplish this mammoth project.

“Sponsorships, Event Promotion and Stage Management are my areas of activity at the Foundation, getting sponsors being more difficult of these. For the sponsorship drive, I would say we would have targeted 70-80% businesses run by Indians in the metro Atlanta area. Besides this we approached a sizeable number of blue chip corporations to be part of this show, and were lucky enough to succeed”. It wasn’t easy said Tikkoo and involved making hundreds of calls, sending out an equal number of emails, meeting innumerable people (all kinds), and spending multiple weeks together trying to achieve this. “It involved standing in front of Global Mall, Decatur, and other Indian hotspots for more than 8 hours distributing thousands of event promotional material. I remember there were times, when I

spent half a day at Global mall and half a day at Decatur for numerous weekends together.” Asha Bhosle talked about the efforts on stage and how when she heard about the work the foundation was doing for underprivileged children, she was moved deeply and wanted to be part of it. Asha Bhosle has reportedly adopted some children from the foundation.

Another thing most non-profit organizations face is skepticism about where the dollars are going. Robin Raina says so far they have not had to deal with it, but as the foundation and its work grows he expects the brickbats to come along with the appreciation. “ I will be sending out a letter that anyone who is dissatisfied with the foundation’s work will get a refund of his/her donation with no questions asked, if it is done in the same calendar year.” Raina says what moved him was the fact that even his accountant send him a check for 600 dollars when she saw how every penny was accounted for so meticulously. “We received 60 dollars from a school in Minnesota and 1700 pounds from a Scottish school, raised by the kids. Its things like that which make us believe we are on the right track.”