



MUSIC REVIEW



Album: **Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan**
Artist: **Various**



THIS week's big Bollywood release *Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan* has a mixed bag of songs from composers with contrasting styles. Unfortunately, pretty much all the songs get stuck in second gear. *Jee Rahe The Hum* is a decent song totally ruined by the amateurish vocals of lead star Salman Khan. *Yentamma* and *Bathukamma* seem like cynical attempts to ride the South Indian wave, with both coming across as poor copies of songs that would be found in Telugu cinema. Similarly, the catchy *Billi Billi* is a watered-down version of better songs from a similar genre. *Naiyo Lagda* is the best track, but like the others has little originality.



Single: **Mera Na**
Artist: **Sidhu Moose Wala Ft. Burna Boy & Steel Banglez**



Sidhu Moose Wala was gunned down in 2022, aged just 28 and left a gaping hole in the music industry. This top track, which he recorded before his death in London with British Asian music producer Steel Banglez, illustrates all that was brilliant about him. By combining meaningful lyrics with great vocals and music from contrasting genres, the superbly structured song finds a middle ground that connects with a wide array of listeners. Great vocals from African sensation Burna Boy add an extra layer to the near perfect song, which illustrates why the late singer, rapper, and composer is so missed by fans around the world.

'The common ingredient in all my albums is love'

TALENTED SINGER SHIVALI BHAMMER ON BHAJANS AND SPIRITUALITY

by ASJAD NAZIR

IT WAS 13 years ago that Shivali Bhammer won acclaim for taking devotional music across a new frontier with her debut album *The Bhajan Project*.

By combining commercial music with bhajans rooted in centuries-old tradition, she successfully connected cross-generational listeners to spiritual sounds in a contemporary way and inspired others to follow in her footsteps. After releasing further music, the talented singer returned recently with her new album *The Bhajan Project 2*, which combines spiritual sounds with eclectic contemporary genres including r'n'b, soul, rock, and pop. *Eastern Eye* caught up

HIGHER POWER: Shivali Bhammer; and (inset below) the cover of her new album

with the singer to discuss spirituality, bhajan music, her new album, and teaming up with popular artist Arjun once again.

THE BHAJAN PROJECT 2
MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF TRADITIONAL BHAJANS
shivali



What first connected you to bhajans?

I was two or three years old and my great grandmother, alongside my great aunts were my first friends. They would teach me mantras and

bhajans, and I would jump off the sofa and sing, chant, shout with vigour. I think it was always inside of me.

What would you say are your fondest memories of creating the first *The Bhajan Project* album?

One of the fondest memories I have is from before I was signed up for *The Bhajan Project*. I was 15 years old. It was a Saturday, and I sat with my rakhi brother Arjun, who produced my albums, and on a whim decided we should re-create the *Hanuman Chalisa*. I remember singing as he played guitar, and knew we were onto something special. I just didn't know how special it would one day become.

That acclaimed album was path-breaking. Why did you take so long to create a follow up to it?

I released my second album, *Urban Temple* in 2012 and then it was a long gap till *The Bhajan Project 2*. The release was delayed three years by the pandemic, which didn't help, but I think it's because I was experimenting with other facets of the arts like scriptwriting, acting, and living in New York.

How have you changed as an artist since that first album?

I keep telling people 'life has humbled me' because it truly has. That first album was born out of innocence, and inexperience. Now as an artist, I have gone through many ups and downs, and the realities of life have forced me to self-reflect and deeply evolve.

But all my albums have one common ingredient, which is love.

Tell us about *The Bhajan Project 2*
This is a follow up to the first *Bhajan Project*, whereas *Urban Temple* was quite experimental in sound. This album plays with pop and r'n'b

sounds, but like the first, we have some very familiar and heartfelt bhajans like *Payoji Maine*, *Raghupati Raghava* and the *Aarti*.

The acoustic guitar is prominent in the sound which represents how Arjun and I used to build bhajans in our childhood. It is very much a 'coming home' album or returning to the roots.

Who are you hoping connects with these compositions?

Everyone and anyone. Although my bhajans have attracted the Hindu

'Devotional music is not for everyone'

youth, especially those outside of India, it has also connected with the older generation, and I think that's the beauty of it. I just want the compositions to be accessible.

What was the biggest challenge of creating this album?

Some mantras are difficult to produce because they are very repetitive. We had to work hard on the *ShaanTi Paath* to make it sound interesting or different from one bar to another, because the words and melody is just the same thing repeating itself for the duration of the song. That has always been our challenge, which is why I think our bhajans stand out. We work hard to make sure there is texture and layers to the music even if the lyrics are repetitive.

What was it like for you to get singer, songwriter, and musician Arjun on composing duties again on this album?

We are brother and sister, so it's like hanging out with your family all day. It's super fun. Sometimes we wind each other up, and sometimes we spend about three hours procrastinating. We both went through many life challenges during the production of this album, so I believe there is a lot of soul in the sound.

Did you learn anything new while creating this album?

The power of pauses – we created many gaps in different songs at places where there traditionally were none, and that gave songs a whole new vibe and energy.

How much would you say spirituality has helped you?

Spirituality is a state of mind. It is the constant pursuit of truth, compassion, and enlightenment. It is the foundation of my being; it hasn't just helped me in life, it is my life in many ways. I don't know how to divorce myself from spirituality – it's like the *Matrix* pill, I took it.

How much does it mean to you that other singers have followed in your footsteps by creating accessible contemporary bhajans?

It's great as long as everyone does things for the right reasons. I've seen people try and do contemporary bhajans because they saw I was signed for them, but that isn't a great strategy. You must do something because you believe in it wholeheartedly no matter what the outcome is.

What can we expect next from you?

More music, more magic and more mayhem. I indulge in the full spectrum of performing arts so there is always something around the corner.

Why do you love music?

It expresses everything that cannot be put in words. I feel like it is the universal language, the universal religion, and the universal form of love. It unites us all and with such humility.

Why should we pick up *The Bhajan Project 2*?

Just to check it out and see if you can relate to the music. Devotional music is not for everyone, but I hope even if it isn't your usual cup of tea, you will still find something either in the voice or sound that touches you.

www.shivali.co.uk