

Rhythm of Life

Listening to popular Hindi Bollywood numbers on Vividh Bharathi or All India Radio, watching movies as part of social life maybe a set routine for Indians. But watching Hindi movies on a regular basis and listening to popular songs and making it a part of one's social life in Lebanon is different. This is where Levon Ichkhanian got his inspiration from.

He reminisces, "Back in those days, in Lebanon, it was a pretty traditional setup where men went to work and women managed homes and raised kids. I remember accompanying my mother to the cinema halls and watch a whole lot of Hindi movies. My mother used to cry while watching those emotional scenes. I also used to listen to those popular Hindi numbers being played on a radio. And I guess my Hindi music connections go way back to those days." Levon, who plays regularly with AR Rahman and his troupe in Canada, is a multi-instrumental player, guitar, bajitar, oud, mandolin and bouzouki are a few that comes to the mind immediately.

Levon is of Armenian descent and was born in Lebanon. His family moved to Toronto in 1977, Levon was a 12 year old then. Coming from a family of musicians, music runs in Levon's blood stream. After landing in Toronto, it did not take him long to follow his passion. Levon's first professional gig was as a 16 year old, backing Adiss, an Armenian singer. From there on, it has been a pleasant musical journey for Levon. He recounts his meeting with Hariharan. "Four years ago, I was asked to play my instrument at a recording for a singer from India. I went with my banjitar and one look at it, the singer (who I later came to know is Hariharan) wanted to know if this is what I will be playing. I said yes. Once I started playing, Hariharan liked it. Besides playing with Hariharan, Levon has been part of AR Rahman's troupe/orchestra that helped render tunes for box-office hits like Rang De Basanti, Guru and the yet to be released Rajnikanth's Tamil film Sivaji. Not to forget The Lord of the Rings orchestra as well. Levon says amazing is the only word that comes to his mind while describing Indian music. And he says Indian singers have an unbelievable range. "I love the range, style and contrast of Hariharan or a Shankar Mahadevan. Music is a passion with him and listening to Levon, one can literally get hooked onto music and its supporting tales. If Indian music connects him to his childhood, there is no dearth of inspirations from other countries either. Fairuz, a legendary singer from Lebanon is another source of inspiration for him.

Levon considers music as his language, "because it evokes feelings and emotions."