

From Goanet archives. Transcribed by Roland Francis.

Chris & Lorna - Love and Longing in Mumbai's Jazz Age
by Naresh Fernandes - July 2003

When jazz swung into the subcontinent, Goans seized it as the song of their souls. "Jazz gave us freedom of expression," explains Frank Fernand, who played in the Teddy Weatherford band at the Taj. "You played jazz the way you feel morning you play differently, evening you play differently." New tunes came to India as sheet music, but that sometimes wasn't much help even to accomplished readers: jazz contained such unconventional instructions as glissando, mute and attack. "But when we heard the records, we knew how to play the notes," Frank says. For a Goan jazzman, the greatest accolade was to be told that he "played like a negro".

No one seems to have received more praise on this account than Chic Chocolate, who occasionally led a two-trumpet barrage at the Green's Hotel with Chris Perry. Chic whose name Goans pronounced as if they were talking about a rooster's offspring was known as the "Louis Armstrong of India". His stratospheric trumpet notes and his growly scattling were a tribute to his New Orleans idol. "He had a negro personality," Frank Fernand marvels. "He played everything by heart." His stage presence was unforgettable. As the band reached a crescendo, Chic would fall on one knee and raise his horn to the stars.

Chic had been born Antonio Xavier Vaz in Aldona in 1916. His mother wanted him to be a mechanic and earn a respectable living, but he dreamt of a life in music. He started out with a group called the Spotlights and, by 1945, his own outfit, Chic and the Music Makers, beat out 12 other bands to win a contract at Green's, which also was owned by the Taj. The pianist Johnny Fernandes, who later married Chic's daughter, Ursula, remembers the stir the trumpet player caused when he played at parties in Dhobi Talao homes. He says, "People would flock to see him as if he was a (movie) hero." To have Chic perform at a wedding or a christening was a matter of prestige, but it could bump up the catering expenses. "You'd have hordes of gatecrashers coming to hear him," Johnny explains. Chic, his contemporaries say, not only played like a negro, he even looked like one. The swarthinness of some Goan jazz musicians, such as the saxophonist Joe Pereira, came from ancestors with roots in Portugal's African colonies of Mozambique and Angola. But Chic's dark skin is attributed by one musician to his being a Mahar, a member of an untouchable caste.

Many of Bombay's jazzmen, this musician says, were drawn from this caste. As he theorised: "In Goa, Mahars were grave diggers. They'd also play snare drums and blow conches in funeral bands. When they came to Bombay, they became good jazz drummers and trumpet players."

They say Chic performed one of his greatest feats of improvisation offstage. "Chic lived in Marine Lines and had a girlfriend called Catherine, with whom he had a son," a matter that shocked conservative Catholic sensibilities, one musician recalls. "But then he decided to marry another girl. The wedding was to be the Wodehouse Road Cathedral in Colaba. But Catherine landed up there with her son, so the wedding was shifted hastily to Gloria Church in Byculla", across town. The befuddled guests waited patiently in the Colaba church, even as Chic said "I do" in the deserted neo-Gothic nave of Gloria church.

Many early Goan jazzmen were sideman in Micky Correa's band, which played at the Taj from 1939 to 1961. Among them was Ronnie Monserrate's father, Peter, who was known as the "Harry James of India". Peter's five sons formed Bombay's second-generation of Goan jazzmen: Joe and Bosco play trumpet and fluegelhorn, Blasco the trombone, Rex the drums and Ronnie the piano. The family lived in Abu Mansion, an apartment block in the textile mill district of Parel. The boys would come home from school at four and begin to practice, each having been allotted a two-hour slot by their father. The music would continue late into the night, then occasionally start again in the wee hours when Peter Monserrate and his gang violinist Joe Menezes, trombone player Anibal Castro, drummer Leslie Godinho and Chic Chocolate returned from a drink after work to demand an impromptu performance. As their mother cooked up a meal, the Monserrate boys would go through their paces. Their neighbours, mainly working-class Hindus, tolerated this with fortitude. Ronnie surmises, "I suppose it's like living next to the railway tracks. After a while, you get immune to the roar of the trains if you want to get any sleep."

Activity in the Monserrate household would get especially hectic just before the biennale Sound of Surprise talent shows that the Bombay Musicians' Association organised on the Sunday in November closest to the feast of St Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians. Bombay's hottest swing bands took to the Birla theatre's revolving stage to compete for the Franz Marques award for best original composition. Even though Peter Monserrate rehearsed his band hard in the corridors of Abu Mansion, his group never managed to win the trophy. His friend, Chris Perry, won in 1964, the first year it was given out. Toni Pinto took the award home in 1966 for Forever True, a gentle bossa nova tune that leapt out at him late one night as he travelled home in a cab. With only the bulb above the meter for light, he scribbled the theme down on the back of a matchbox.

Goan musicians who didn't play the nightclubs mainly worked at weddings, Parsi navjote initiation ceremonies and Catholic funerals. For many, finding a job for the evening meant taking a trip to Alfred's, the Irani restaurant on Princess Street, midway between Chris's home and Lorna's apartment. Tony Cyril, Dennis Vaz, Johnny Rodrigues, Johnny Baptista, Mike Machado and Chris

Perry the major bandleaders each had a regular table at which they'd slurp up endless cups of milky chai. "You'd come there every morning and hang around there as a routine," says Johnny Fernandes, Chic Chocolate's son-in-law. People who wanted to liven up their parties would land up at Alfred's and approach one or the other leader. The cry would go up: one bass player needed. Two trumpets and one piano. "Once you got your assignment, you'd go home to get suit and head out to the venue," Johnny says. It paid to be sharply turned out: in addition to their 15 rupee fee, musicians got three extra rupees for dressing up in a white jacket and black trousers.

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When Bollywood films are beamed through their melodramatic prism of stock characters and broad stereotypes, Catholics emerge as not being quite Indian. They speak a mangled Hindi patois with Anglicised accents. They're dolled up in Western clothes. The men are given to wearing climatically inappropriate jackets and felt hats. Unlike Hindus who knock back the occasional glass of something in bars, Catholic men tipple at home, as their wives and children look on. Still, they're genial drunks, unthreatening sidekicks to the hero. Often, their role as sideman was literal: The screen musicians backing the hero as he performs that nightclub sequence that seemed mandatory in every Hindi film shot in the '50s answer to names like George and Sidney and Michael.

As for Catholic women, they never wear saris and their immodest legs show out from under their frocks. Older Catholic women, often called Mrs Sequeira or Mrs D'Souza, are landladies or kindly neighbours offer the hero consolation when he is temporarily stymied in his pursuit of the loved one. But younger Catholic women (with notable exceptions) are danger incarnate. They smoke. They have boyfriends to whom their parents don't object. They dance in nightclubs and lure men to their doom with their promise of a world in which the sexes interact more freely, in which arranged marriages aren't the norm, in which love isn't taboo. In the end, though, the Catholic characters have only minor roles, a reflection of their lives at the margins of Indian society.

The bit parts in which Catholics found themselves cast on screen weren't an accurate portrayal of the vital role Goans played the Hindi film industry. Until the '80s, India had no pop music save for Hindi film songs. Millions memorised and hummed the compositions of C Ramachandra, Shankar and Jaikishan, Laxmikant and Pyrelal and S D Burman, whose names rolled by in large letters at the beginning of the movies. But the Sound of India actually was created by Goan musicians, men whose names flickered by in small type under the designation "arranger". It's clear. The Hindi film classics that resound across the subcontinent and in Indian homes around the world wouldn't have been made without Goans. Their dominance of the Hindi film world is partly a function of the structural differences between Indian and Western music. Indian classical music is melodic. The ragas that form

the basis of Indian music are unilinear, each instrument or vocalist exploring an independent line. To move an audience, film scores must be performed by orchestras, with massed instruments playing in harmony. Only Goans, with their training in Western music, knew how to produce what was required.

Frank Fernand was among the first Goans in Bollywood and assisted such worthies as Anil Biswas, Hemant Kumar and Kishore Kumar. As he describes it, the men who composed the scores for Hindi films couldn't write music and had no idea of the potential of the orchestras they employed. They would come to the studio and sing a melody to their Goan amanuensis, or pick out the line on a harmonium. The Goan assistant would write it out on sheet paper, then add parts for the banks of strings, the horn sections, the piano and the percussion. But the assistant wasn't merely taking dictation: It was his job to craft the introductions and bridges between verse and chorus.

Drawing from their bicultural heritage and their experience in the jazz bands, the Goans gave Bollywood music its promiscuous charm, slipping in slivers of Dixieland stomp, Portuguese fados, Ellingtonesque doodles, cha cha cha, Mozart and Bach themes. Then they would rehearse the orchestras, which were staffed almost entirely by Goans. After all, hardly anyone else knew how to play these Western instruments. To Frank Fernand, the music directors were mere subcontractors, men whose main job was liaising with the financiers. "We arrangers did all the real work. They'd show off to the directors and producers and try to show that they were indispensable. But to be a music director, salesmanship was more important than musicianship."

Chic Chocolate spent his mornings assisting C Ramachandra, who is popularly credited with having introduced swing into Bollywood. But tunes like Ina Mina Dika and Gori Gori (inspired by the mambo standard Tico Tico) bear Chic's unmistakable signature. His stamp is also audible on the throbbing Cuban percussion opening of Shola Jo Bhadke, a tune from Albela. Chic and the Music Makers made a brief appearance in the film to perform the tune, clad in an Indian wardrobe director's frilly Latinesque fantasy. Cawas Lord's conga beats out the introduction and hands clap clave. Chic smiles broadly at the camera in the best Satchmo tradition.

Among the most reputed arrangers in Bollywood was the venerable Sebastian D'Souza, who did his best-known work with the duo of Shankar and Jaikishan between 1952 and 1975. "His arrangements were so brilliant, composers would take snatches of his background scores and work them into entire tunes," says Merlin D'Souza, Sebastian's daughter-in-law and a rising Bollywood music assistant herself. Sebastian had a brush with the film world in pre-Partition Lahore, where he led a band at Stiffle's hotel. His earliest arrangements were for Bollywood composers Shyam Sundar and Mohammed Ali, recalls the saxophonist Joe Pereira. Joe was Sebastian's cousin, and had

been adopted as a 14-year-old by his older relative. Joe would spend his mornings taking music lessons from Sebastian, then take him his tiffin in the afternoon when Sebastian took a break from rehearsals.

After 1947, Sebastian made his way to Bombay, but found that there was a glut of bandleaders in the hotels. He called on his Lollywood contacts and made his way to the film recording studios, where he got a break with O P Nayyar. The first tune he arranged was Pritam aan milo, which was sung by C H Atma in 1955. Merlin, who occasionally accompanied her father-in-law to the studios, remembers him walking around with a pencil tucked behind his ear. He devised a system of notation that incorporated the microtones that characterised Indian melodies. Sebastian was highly regarded by his musicians for his ever-generous nature. He often lent musicians money to buy better instruments or tide over a crisis. His contemporaries also remember him for the patience he showed even less-than-dexterous musicians. Merlin says that Sebastian was willing to give anyone a break. "Even if you played the viola haltingly, you'd find a place there, on the back row," she says. That proved the lifeline for many Goan musicians, who, by the mid-70s, increasingly were being thrown out of work as Bombay's nightclub scene went into decay. A more rigorous enforcement of the prohibition act and a crippling tax on establishments featuring live music kept patrons away. Besides, rock and roll was changing musical tastes and Bombay was developing the ear for beat groups. The film studio, which until then had been a source of supplementary income, suddenly became everyone's main job. But the relatively simply Hindi film music Goan musicians were forced to play ate them away. "Their passion was to play jazz and big band," Ronnie Monserrate says. "This was their bread and butter but they didn't enjoy it. They were really frustrated. That's probably why so many of them became alcoholics." It took only four or five hours to record each tune. Musicians would be paid at the end of each shift, so they'd grab their money and head out for a drink. Few actually cared to see the movies in which they'd performed. Chris Perry also had a stint in the film studios, assisting Khayyam and working with such names as Lakshmikant and Pyarelal, R D Burman and Kalyanji Anandji. He eventually was emboldened to produce his own film. Bhuiarntlo Munis (The Man from the Caves) was the first colour film to be made in Konkani, the language spoken along the west coast between southern Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, and which is the mother tongue of most Goans.

Chris wrote the story, the music and the lyrics. It starred Ivo Almedia, Helen Pereira and C Alvares, who had gained prominence for their work in tiatr, as Goa's satirical musical theatre is known. The film was based on The Count of Monte Cristo, a tale that has great resonance in Goa because one of the characters, Abbe Faria, who in the Dumas novel is described as an Italian priest, in real life had been born in Candolim, in

Goa, in 1756. Father Jose Custodio de Faria is acknowledged as having been among the earliest protagonists of scientific hypnotism, and a statue of him stands prominently in Goa's capital, Panjim. The priest, who moved to Lisbon, was forced to flee to France in 1787 when a rebellion he had been associated with in Goa was crushed. The Conjuração dos Pintos, the conspiracy of the Pinto family, was the first Asian struggle that aimed to replace European colonial rule with an independent state on the European model. That's how Dumas came to meet the man he knew as "the black Portuguese". Abbe Faria threw himself into the vortex of the French Revolution, was imprisoned and died of a stroke in 1819. In the Dumas novel, Abbe Faria takes it upon himself to educate the hero, Dantes, when the two are unjustly imprisoned in the French version of Alcatraz for 14 years. Dantes escapes, transforms himself into the Count of Monte Cristo and destroys his enemies. When the novel was published in 1844, it earned the Vatican's ire because the tale was seen to propagate the un-Christian impulse of revenge. But as the trumpeter Frank Fernand points out, it seemed like an entirely appropriate subject for Chris Perry, the man whose quick temper was the stuff of popular lore.

One April evening in 1966, the Goan pop musician Remo Fernandes, barely a teenager then, strolled down to Panjim's Miramar beach to take the air on the esplanade. All Panjim society, high and low, was there too. "There, decked up in our over-flared bell bottoms, we checked out the chicks dolled up in what we all thought were mini skirts after all they did reach a full quarter of an inch above the knee," Remo recalls. Keeping an eye on the younger folk, clumps of parents sat on the green wooden benches on the esplanade, "running a commentary on whose son had gone off with whose daughter for a walk along the sea".

>From a kiosk on the beach, a pretty lady named Bertinha played records on the speaker system provided by the Panjim Municipality. She had a weakness for Cliff Richard tunes, Remo says. But that evening, she spun out a song called Bebdo (Drunkard). Miramar Beach was hypnotised. "The Panjim citizenry stopped in its tracks, the sunken sun popped up for another peep, the waves froze in mid-air," Remo has written. "What manner of music was this, as hep as hep can be, hitting you with the kick of a mule on steroids? What manner of voice was this, pouncing at you with the feline power of a jungle lioness? And hold it no, it couldn't be yes, it was no was it really? Was this amazing song in Konkani?"

Bebdo had been recorded a few months earlier by Chris Perry and Lorna in a Bombay studio and released by HMV. The jacket bore the flirty image that would later hang outside the Venice nightclub. The 45 rpm record had four tracks, opening with the rock-and-rolling Bebdo and ending on the flip side with the dreamy ballad, Sopon. "Sophisticated, westernised urban Goa underwent a slow-motion surge of inexplicable emotions: the disbelief, the wonder, the appreciation, and then finally a rising, soaring and bubbling

feeling of pride," Remo says. "The pride of being Goan. The pride of having a son of the soil produce such music. Of having a daughter of the soil sing it thus. And, most of all, of hearing the language of the soil take its rightful place in popular music after a period of drought. Chris and Lorna had come to stay."

It isn't as if there hadn't been Konkani records before. HMV released its first Konkani tunes in 1927. The earliest records had been made by Anthony Toloo, Joe Luis, L. Borges, Kid Boxer and Miguel Rod, all of them cantarists from the tiatr world. But by the '60s, Konkani song had grown creaky and old fashioned. The melodies often were copied from western songs and the lyrics, for the most, were banal. Konkani songs, he says "were predictable to a fault you could whistle the next line and anticipate the next chord change on the very first hearing. Add to that a few wrong notes from two inevitable trumpets and modest recording quality."

Chris Perry's tunes shattered the mould. They married the sophistication of swing with the earthiness of the Goan folk song. "The songs were sensuous, funny, sexy, sad, sentimental, foot-tapping," Remo raves. "His songs are peopled by unforgettable fictional characters whom we have come to picture as real-life acquaintances. Bebdo, Pisso (Madman) and Red Rose are as palpable as personages created by a skilled novelist or cartoonist. He has taken us on unforgettable journeys to Lisboa and Calangute, " the Goan beach that was being colonised by hippies around the time Chris was making his landmark recordings. Some of the tunes had been written for the two tiatr shows Perry had produced: Nouro Mhozo Deunchar (My Husband, the Devil) and Tum ani Hanv (You and Me). Nouro Mhozo Deunchar was Goa's introduction to Lorna and the 28 performances were an unqualified success. The crowds were so large, people waited outside the performance tent to hear her voice, one correspondent writes. After the shows, people would surge backstage to shake Lorna's hand. One tune she sang, Saud (Peace), became a standard at Goan weddings, and is still sung before the toast is raised.

Chris Perry's heart may have been in Goa, but it was Bombay that made it possible for him to record his classics. His albums crystallised the nostalgia of Bombay's Goan community, giving voice to their rootlessness and his. Bombay allowed him to soak in jazz and rock and roll, sounds from which he crafted his own template. Besides, his Bombay nightclub stints help him assemble the tight-knit band that accompanied him to the studio where his Bollywood experience came in very handy. "His recording work meant that, unlike the tiatr people, he knew his way around the studio," notes Ronnie Monserrate. "He knew about placing microphones to get the best sound and about mixing."

Most of all, there was Lorna. Her rich, sassy voice, everyone's agreed, is what alchemised Chris's compositions. Their long years together gave him an acute sense of her potential and he composed especially for her. "Her

nightingale's voice created the magic in rendering the songs effectively," insists Tomazinho Cardoz, the tiatrist who went on to become the speaker of Goa's legislative assembly. Remo, among others, has no doubts about this. "Without Chris there would have been no Lorna, and without Lorna there would have been no Chris," he has written.

Lorna stopped performing in 1973 after her relationship with Chris Perry fell apart. The stories about their break up are hazy on the details. In one version, Lorna came home from a vacation to find that the apartment they shared had a new lock on the door. Chris's wife, Lily, is said to have served him an ultimatum and he went home to Dabul. But before the split, he'd made Lorna sign a bond on stamp paper, prohibiting her for 20 years from singing with any other band leader without his permission. He is said to have reasoned that Lorna was his creation, so she had no right to perform without him. Chris is said to enforced the bond in a muscular fashion. "Once, Emiliano got her to sing with him when he was performing at the Flamingo. Chris landed up there, chased him all the way down Marine Drive and gave him a black eye," one musician says. "Imagine doing that to Emiliano. He's such a harmless bugger."

Another musician told of how Chris would leap out of his seat at Alfred's restaurant when he saw Lorna go by on her way to the bazaar. She would squirm out of his clutches, but was terrified enough to refuse all offers to perform again.

Chris eventually moved to Dubai with his family in the mid-'70s, and opened the Dubai Music School. The split is said to have left Lorna a wreck. People who know her say she became an alcoholic. She worked as a secretary in a firm that sold earth moving equipment for a while, but disappeared from the world of show business. Every afternoon, though, Goa radio would broadcast the tunes she and Chris had recorded and two decades after she'd made her last record, every Goan still knew Lorna's voice. Rumours boiled over: She's emigrated. To Canada. To Australia. No, she's dead. *

Goans were still discussing Lorna's whereabouts a quarter of a century after Ronnie Monserrate first backed her at the Venice. Now a successful record producer and hot film studio sideman with his brothers, Ronnie kept receiving inquiries about Lorna when he toured Goa in 1994 to promote a new album. He decided to take a trip to Guzder House to persuade her to record again.

A woman fresh from the shower with her hair in towel opened the door. She sat him down and asked what he wanted. "I want to see Lorna," he explained. She replied, "That's me." Ronnie was taken aback. "She looked like a wreck. I remembered her as she was in 1971 a total bombshell. But since then, she had hit the bottle and become total gone-case."

It took a while to convince Lorna that he was serious about getting her into the studio again. She told Ronnie that it had been a couple of decades since she'd last performed. "She was trying to tell me tangentially that anyone who'd tried to get her to sing had got a pasting from Chris Perry," Ronnie says. But after another visit, Ronnie managed to recruit her mother to his cause and win Lorna over. They began rehearsing in February 1995, knocking the rust off her voice. "The old power was still there," Ronnie says. "I began to feel good about the project." Ronnie also made a trip to HMV's vaults to dig out the infamous contract. The company's lawyer assured him that it wasn't legally binding. Back in Goa, Ronnie had recruited Gabriel Gomes to write tunes for the album. "It had been Gabru's dream to have Lorna sing his songs," Ronnie says. Gabriel set to work in a frenzy of cigarettes, building into such a peak that, after composing just one track, he took ill and had to be taken to hospital. He died shortly thereafter. New composers had to be brought in.

When the recording of Hello Lorna finally got underway in a Juhu studio five months later, Ronnie would travel back across town with her after each session. She was still afraid that Chris Perry would accost her.

On December 3, 1996, Lorna performed publicly for the first time in 24 years at a tourism festival at Miramar beach. The traffic was snarled up for kilometres as Goans swarmed to catch a glimpse of the legend. State police say that the show drew 300,000 people the biggest crowd since the one that had gathered to celebrate Goa's liberation from Portuguese rule in 1961. At a press conference the day before, Lorna had been mobbed. "There was mayhem," Ronnie recalls. "People ran unto stage and were hugging her and kissing her. They were so overjoyed that Lorna was back." Chris Perry landed up at Lorna's hotel in a last-minute attempt to scare her off. She wasn't in, so he left a note. Ronnie intercepted the missive and didn't pass it on. A few hours later, cheers erupted as Lorna climbed to the stage, looking out over a choppy ocean of heads. When the hubbub subsided, Ronnie's aching piano introduction washed over the audience and Lorna began to belt out the opening tune from her comeback album. "Aicat mozo tavo," she urged. "Avaz mozo tumchea canar sadonc ishtani ravo portun aicunc mozo tavo." Hear my voice. Let the sound linger in your ears, my friend. Hear my voice.