

# Keeping the romance alive

What is the price of fame? Incessant travel, for one. Constant tension over the fickle media, for another. Smiling all the time in public, posing for photos with strangers, suffering autograph hunters, being surrounded, squeezed out of breathing space. Does all this bother A. Hariharan, the south Indian singer who's made it big in the world of ghazal and pop? "Hey, I asked for this. I wanted it. No cribbing." It's all in the fame game.

In the lull between the Colonial Cousins' first and second albums, the pony-tailed Hariharan is back to performing ghazals, and the inevitable film songs, approximately once a week in cities across the country. In Bangalore for the Greeshma Gana along with Vishwa Mohun Bhatt recently, Hariharan had the dubious distinction of being the first singer to perform at our new indoor stadium. Definitely not a good idea. The acoustics were resoundingly poor. The notes kept returning to the artistes like bad dreams. Still, both pushed valiantly on.

Ghazals have not only belied dire predictions of a short-lived popularity — but have even found a new generation of listeners. "As long as there is romance the ghazal will stay," says Hariharan. So whether it is Lucknow, with its strong Urdu tradition, or Chennai, which welcomes its native with ardour, Hariharan isn't short of *wab-wabs* in India.

He has two new albums out, doing quite well: *Jashn* from Venus and *Visaal* from a new venture called Navras, whose promoters are based in London. They have cleverly labelled the rather classical renditions in *Visaal* as "ghazals for connoisseurs" and provided translations of the poems for the uninitiated. For *Jashn* Hari has tried a promo with Bangalore model Shyla Lopez. *Unse jab jab bbi mulaqatein buin* is the song and we have Shyla and Hari usurping our own romantic evocations with very literal graphics. Still, that's how the game is played now. If Hari has learnt anything after two decades of striving, it is that you must run with the pack.

There are two goals for him now. One, to release the next Colonial Cousins album on an international label. Somebody big, like Time-Warner. "We know there's a worldwide market for our music. But we need worldwide marketing as well. And only a top company can do that," he says.

But there's another dream Hariharan lives with. And that is to sing pure classical music. He knows he will have to return to rigorous training if he is to live out his ambition. "Classical music demands purity," he acknowledges. "I will be massacred if I venture outside the form." When will be the right time to switch? Maybe a couple of years later. After all, he has re-invented himself many times already. Once more, then, with feeling.



Hariharan: music for all seasons