

Illusion and reality : playback singers of Bollywood and Hollywood

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Abstract:

India's film production industry, referred to commonly as Bollywood, and the film production industry in America, referred to as Hollywood, have created a large number of musical films since sound was introduced in motion pictures. Both create fictional stories—illusions, if you will—through the use of prerecorded sound and playback technology coupled with lip-synching interpolated onto filmed images. While studies exist that compare the music of both production centres, there is very little research that compares both, and very little research on playback singers. Playback singers in both Bollywood and Hollywood may or may not be the actors who appear on the screen; however, people in the Bollywood system—its directors, producers, creators, as well as the critics and journalists who write about it—are very open about this practice, and playback singing is a highly respected career. Conversely, in the Hollywood system, playback singing that is done by an individual other than the screen actor remains uncredited or under-credited, and those who do the work are just hired workers; they are not respected as artists in the same way that their Bollywood counterparts are. I believe this difference has a cultural basis, shaped by variation in the way that illusion and reality are expressed by film production and interpreted by audiences in the two cultures. Through primary and secondary research, this project seeks to discover the differences and to understand how cultural implications of illusion and reality affect the playback singers in both film centres.

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