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Reaching the end of the rainbow



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National Award-winning music directors Aravind and Jaishankar talk about following their passion and their long journey from obscurity to popularity

I'm at Aravind Murali and Jaishankar Iyer's cosy studio in T. Nagar, which also doubles up as a hangout for close friends. I haven't been here in a while, but every time I come, I'm struck by the silence in the sound-proofed studio setting. Gone are the pesky honking of two-wheelers, the angry snarls of autos, the constant rumbling grunts of buses. The rush of Chennai disappears as you step into this peaceful environment.

Usually, Aravind is seated on the sofa with his headphones on, and Jai is in front of the computer console, his face lit by the white light from the screen. Things were no different on a Tuesday morning, when they got a call saying they had just won the National Film Award for best background score for Sruti Harihara's documentary, *A Far Afternoon*.

Nineteen years ago, Aravind, a graduate from BITS-Pilani, and Jaishankar, a graduate from Madras Christian College, decided to take the road less travelled and make **music** for a living.

Their conservative parents were initially shocked at the decision, but eventually relented, and the duo's first recording studio was set up in a bedroom in Aravind's apartment. They got their friends Bombay Jayashri and Malgudi Subha to sing on a demo with a few songs they had written. They then distributed these by hand to ad agencies, filmmakers and music directors all over Chennai, and even sent a few to Mumbai.

Six months down the line, they got their first break when a filmmaker offered them a jingle for a new ad film he was doing for Naidu Hall. Once this jingle aired, they got more work; through their career, the duo has composed over a thousand jingles for brands like Ashok Leyland, Veneta Cucine, TVS, ESPN, Pepsi and many others, including the hugely popular 'Whistle Podu' anthem for the erstwhile IPL team, Chennai Super Kings.

They've also composed music for a few art films, two of which – *Silent Scream* and *Oorukku Noor Per* – have gone on to win National Awards for best debut short film and best Tamil feature film respectively. They've scored the music for *Malini 22 Palayamkottai*, a remake of the Malayalam film *22 Female Kottayam* and the Telugu hit *Ishq*, recently.

But despite their successes, they've relatively been in the shadows till this award. Now, they've been thrown into the limelight. Aravind says, "My phone hasn't stopped ringing – friends, clients, musicians and a few requests for interviews!"

It hasn't been an easy road. In the jingle and film business, work is unpredictable and there have been numerous ups and downs. Aravind quotes novelist Erica Jong, "Everyone has talent. What's rare is the courage to follow it to the dark places where it leads.' We've had our share of sunshine and we've been in some very dark places too. What's kept us going is the fact that we don't need to check our bank account to see if we're happy. If we've had a satisfactory day doing what we love, that means more to us than all the awards in this world."

Jai, who is quiet most of the time or answers in cryptic monosyllables pitches in: "Living off music is tough. It sometimes feels like you've been chasing rainbows. You run and you run, but you find yourself at the same distance from your goal as when you started."

But sometimes, just sometimes, if you persist and keep running, you reach the end of that rainbow. For Aravind and Jaishankar, it's been a long road. But it's finally here.

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