



Keith Peters

Touch base with Keith's bass line

For a man who's performed over 3,000 live concerts and played on over 4,000 film songs, including all of A R Rahman's hits, Keith Peters is pretty low-profile. Outside the music industry, not many know his name and he is a man of few words. So I'm happy that he's finally accepted my invitation to come home for a drink and a one-on-one chat. I pour him a drink and we begin.

Early influences in music...

My grandparents and my father were my early influences in music. My grandfather, who was in the Army, played the violin, and my grandmother was the church organist at St George's Cathedral.

My father worked in the Railways and his way of unwinding from a hard day's work was to pick up the guitar and sing. My dad was the one who taught me and my brothers the rudiments of chord work and the basic scales etc. My elder brothers Karl and Maxie, who were seven and five years older, were playing in bands by the time they were in their teens and I was exposed to the nuances of performing in a band by the age of eight.

Bass as the preferred choice...

By their late teens, both my elder brothers had turned professionals with Maxie performing in a band in Delhi and Karl playing with bands at the Bamboo Hut and Maxims in Madras.

Karl, being in Madras, was my biggest influence in music and he was and still is my idol. I used to fiddle around with his bass guitar when he was not at home and when he realised I was passionate about the instrument, he started teaching me the basics of bass.

Karl had established himself as one of the best bassists in Madras and he was performing with some of the biggest bands of the time like *The Avengers* and *Black Sheep*.

Music as a profession...

With both my brothers turning professional, it was only natural for me to follow in their footsteps. I started playing professionally in 1983, and in 1985, I got a call from a band in Delhi to perform with them regularly at the Siddharth Continental. I took the train to Delhi and

performed with the band for six months before coming back to Chennai and joining a band that performed at the Taj.

Musical transition...

While I was performing at Park Sheraton, one of the frequent visitors who used to come to hear the band play was a young man by the name of Dilip, which was what A R Rahman was known at the time. AR had just started playing the keyboard for music directors Ilayaraja and Rajkoti.

Drummer Sivamani was the one who first introduced me to Rahman. Siva wanted to record a demo and he called me to the studio where Rahman was playing the keyboard. Shortly after that, Rahman himself called me to play bass in a demo that he was doing for the jingle business. With that demo, Rahman was able to bag a few orders for jingles from companies like Jayabaratham Furniture, Leo Coffee and Mercard and he would call me to the recording studio to play bass on these.

One of these jingles went on to win an award at an advertising award function where film director Mani Ratnam was a guest. Mani Ratnam was so impressed with Rahman's music that he asked him to compose the music for his upcoming film *Roja*. It was a big gamble as AR was an unknown entity at that time.

Full-time studio musician...

In 1992, we started recording the songs for *Roja* in Rahman's house. He had a home studio called Panchattan Recording Inn where the recording was done on a 16 track spool recorder.

When I first heard AR play the tune for *Chinna Chinna Asai*, I got goosebumps. I remember rushing back to my house that night and telling my wife that we had a smash hit on our hands. That album went on to sell over three million copies in both Hindi and Tamil and there was no looking back after that. After *Roja*, Rahman asked me to quit playing with the band at Park Sheraton and asked me to join him full-time at the studio.

Going live...

As Rahman's popularity grew, we started doing live performances all over the world. I've also performed with Zakir Hussain, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, L Subramaniam, Louis Banks, Ranjit Barot, Amit Heri, singer Karthik, Ganesh-Kumaraesh, Harris Jeyaraj, Vasundhara Das and a host of others.

Plans for the future...

It was Rahman who started giving credits for musicians on the album. Prior to this it was only the singers and the music director whose names were mentioned on the film albums. Thanks to Rahman, I have performed on an Oscar award-winning soundtrack and got the opportunity to perform worldwide with some of the best musicians.

REJI VARGHESE

“ THANKS TO A R RAHMAN, I HAVE PERFORMED ON AN OSCAR AWARD-WINNING SOUNDTRACK AND ALSO PERFORMED WORLDWIDE.”