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artist: Shankar Mahadevan album: <i>The Voice Of India Today (Enhanced CD)</i> label: beatScience/Saregama distr: rough trade (D) hoanzi (A) RecRec (CH) release: 19/01/2007	
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Shankar Mahadevan is a man of today's India. Born in the North but of a family from the South; trained in Indian classical music but equally at home whether singing jazz, devotional, film songs or free-form.

His career first broke in '98 when he had a massive, nation-wide hit with "Breathless" – a 3 minute song in which he appeared not to take a breath – but perhaps he's more known in the West for his recent work with John McLaughlin's reformed Shakti, as part of the trio Shankar:Ehsaan:Loy, or as a regular singer for A. R. Rahman.

On these 2CDs we present his hits – including the video for "Breathless" – alongside some of his Tamil, Telugu and other Southern language film songs, as well as forays into jazz and some very rare devotional singing. A perfect introduction to one of the best voices singing in India today.

- **one of India's most popular contemporary singers – at ease with his tradition yet always facing the future**
- **a true reflection of today's India by an artist who is not bound by the film industry but who collaborates and experiments in many different areas**
- **includes bonus video on enhanced CD of his first hit "Breathless"**

Although Hindi is, and will no doubt remain, the national language, in today's India it would be foolhardy for any artist with a desire to be heard throughout the country to ignore those in the South. Here Hindi has no more importance than English and it's Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and other Southern tongues that rule the roost.

Born in a Mumbai (then Bombay) suburb, but of a Southern, Tamil-speaking family, Shankar Mahadevan is well placed to understand the linguistic gymnastics of such a vast and complex country as India.

He received a good education and indeed was a good student. Although trained in both the Carnatic (southern) and Hindusthani (northern) classical styles it was computers – he was part of a team developing 4th generation computer languages for the Oracle Corporation – that provided his first steady employment.

His musical tastes were similarly of an India that looks confidently outward and Weather Report, Stevie Wonder, Pink Floyd and Bobby McFerrin are oft-quoted influences on the young Mahadevan. In this he shares much with his Tamil-rooted and similarly multi-lingual colleague, A.R. Rahman.

But “music was my first love anyway and, somewhere deep down, even though I was doing well in computers, I knew that I'm gonna sing and compose. Because that is the only way I can enjoy, make people enjoy ...”

One of his first opportunities to “make people enjoy”, and on a global level, was in 1987 when he met the Swedish group Mynta. While on a tour of India they managed to hook up with Shankar and the tabla-player, Fazal Qureshi. This was the start of an association that lasted over ten years with five albums and numerous tours to various parts of the globe.

Five years later, in the 1993, Shankar sang a ghazal in the highly acclaimed Merchant-Ivory film “Muhafiz (In Custody)”. Although only a small part and barely credited, with music by Zakir Hussain and Ustad Sultan Khan and based on an Anita Desai novel, people began to take more notice.

But it was “Breathless” in 1998 that really broke him. No film, just a good idea and a great performance. A collaboration between veteran lyricist, Javed Akhtar, and Shankar it proved beyond doubt that given the opportunity Shankar could deliver hits as the title song, seemingly sung in one breath, was rarely off India’s TV screens.

They successfully repeated this collaboration in 2003 for the album “9 Nine”, but not before Shankar had teamed up with Ehsaan Noorani and Loy Mendonsa to form ... Shankar:Ehsaan:Loy. This composing, recording, producing and performing trio started to notch up hits and win the awards, and is a unit that continues today.

In Mahadevan’s most recent collaboration - with John McGlaughlin on the 2006 album ‘Industrial Zen’ and performing live in McGlaughlin’s ‘Remembering Shakti’ tours – there’s a sense of the situation having come full circle.

The original ‘Shakti’ of the 70s was incredibly successful both artistically and, within the context of jazz, commercially. But perhaps what’s sometimes overlooked was the impact on musicians in India. ‘Shakti’ was a unique fusion. There was no sense of exotic kitsch, nor any allowances made in recording or performing quality. Indian and Western musicians were on equal footing and the group became a source of pride to young, outward-looking, Indian musicians.

While Shankar was too young to hear ‘Shakti’ upon first release, their influence reverberated in India perhaps longer than in the West, so it’s poignant, and a credit to McGlaughlin’s ears, that Mahadevan should now find himself performing and recording with such a unit.

Shankar’s versatile ability to perform folk-based, classical, jazz or popular music with energy and skill suggests a musician who is in full command of his technique and completely comfortable with his roots. As such, he is very much the voice of India today.

Iain Scott,
Dunoon, Argyll, 2006

TRACKLISTING:

CD1

1. Breathless
2. Thom Karuvil Irunthom
3. Malayala Mannete
4. O Sahibaa!
5. Jane Kya Hua
6. Om Mahaprana Deepam
7. Main Ek Khwab
8. Adi Alenkiliye Alenkiliye
(with Swarnalatha)
9. Mohini Balakane
10. Baat Meri Suniye To Zara
(with Mahalaxmi)
11. Jung Hai
12. Yenna Solla Pogirai
13. Maine Ek Khwab Dekha

CD1 time: 67:51

CD2

1. Varaaga Nathi
2. Podava Kattuna
3. Padippaattu
4. Vela Vela
5. Deepak Raag
6. Doors Of Desire
(with Louis Banks & Silk)
7. Idhu Manmatha Maadham
(with Nithyasree)
8. Mega Dheera
(with S. Janaki)
9. Sain Sain Chali Hawa
10. Aye Fiza
11. Breathless (video)

CD2 time: 60:07

Shankar Mahadevan - *The Voice Of India Today* will be released in Germany, Switzerland and Austria on January 19, 2007 by beatScience / peacelounge recordings