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## 1,000 sounds, one voice

### Top Indian artist Asha Bhosle plans to mix it up at RBC Center

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Mention the name "Asha" to Bollywood film fans, and that's all you need to say. It's kind of like saying "Barbra" in the U.S.

That first-name relationship Bollywood icon Asha Bhosle shares with her fans can be attributed to a massive body of work. Her 64-year recording career includes about 13,000 recorded songs, according to Bhosle's estimate. Most of them appeared in about 950 Bollywood films, according to others.

But being prolific isn't all there is to it. Bhosle's continuing success and name recognition, even among India's MTV-loving teenyboppers of today, has to do with adaptability and remarkable talent.

She can still summon the bubbly, naughty style she developed in the 1940s and '50s, when she was the chameleonlike "playback singer" for actresses lip-syncing the "vamp" songs in low-budget films.

But as her status grew and the films she sang for improved, the challenges pushed her to explore different phrasing, timing and tone. She's an expert mimic who has sung in more than 15 languages.

All of these talents will be on display when the "Incredibles" tour -- featuring Bhosle with performers Kailash Kher and Kunal Ganjawala -- appears tonight at the RBC Center.

Speaking by phone early this week, Bhosle, 73, says the song selection will include numbers from all phases of her film-singing career -- including the great "hippie" song "Dum Maro Dum" from the 1971 film "Hare Rama Hare Krishna," to more recent hits such as "Tanha Tanha."

"Very popular songs -- some slow, some very fast," promises Bhosle, who speaks quietly and apologizes for her "bad English," which actually isn't so bad.

Her career as a playback singer began with a song for a Marathi film in 1943. For a long time, she took jobs singing for B- and C-movies rejected by her older sister Lata Mangeshkar, also a legendary playback singer. She didn't sing the lead roles at first.

But as the jobs kept coming, the films got better, and the versatility of styles and innovations of top musical directors such as O.P. Nayyar and R.D. Burman -- whom she married in 1980 -- pushed her to master all of them.

"We have so many styles in the films," she says. "Sometimes qawwali, sometimes love songs, sometimes classical."

Bhosle says her most important learning happened during her classical music training during her childhood in Maharashtra, Pune, Kolhapur and Bombay. Her father, who died when she was

young, was an actor and musician who taught her classical singing.

"When you have learned classical, then you can sing any song," she says.

Apparently so. In 1957, she recorded "Ina Mina Dika," widely acknowledged to be the first rock 'n' roll song in India. It helped that she was familiar with the style beforehand.

"Yeah -- 'Rock Around the Clock,' Bill Haley," she recalls. "I had seen that film in '55, '56. I had seen that film, and I liked very much that song."

Not everyone shared her views at the time. "People said, 'My God, what's she singing?' " she says.

The decade that followed was her busiest period. Singing for films ranging in quality and budget on every level of a scale of "A-B-C-D," as she puts it, she'd record as many as five songs in a day, and her whole week was like that.

"And all live, not dubbing," she says. "Nowadays, they dub songs. That's very easy. At that time, four-track machines. Live, with musicians."

She still provides vocals for a lot of young actresses.

"Yeah, very young," she says with a chuckle. "Eighteen years, 20 years."

She's always open to new things, too. In 2005, for instance, she recorded "You've Stolen My Heart: Songs from R.D. Burman's Bollywood" with San Francisco's avant-garde string ensemble The Kronos Quartet. They performed the material together in San Francisco, London, L.A. and Australia.

"I like challenges, yes," says Bhosle, who is also a skilled cook and owns a restaurant in Dubai. "And I'm a workaholic. I have to work all day. If I'm not singing, I have to go to the kitchen."

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## **Info**

Who: Asha Bhosle, with Kailash Kher and Kunal Ganjawala

When: 8:30 p.m. today.

Where: RBC Center, 1400 Edwards Mills Road, Raleigh.

Cost: \$37-\$129, students/seniors; children 6-12, \$10 off; kids younger than 5 free.

Contact: 834-4000; [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

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