

by Jane Anderson

Bollywood has its day

As the BBC Proms stages the first Bollywood Prom, *RT* catches up with **Don Black** to talk about songwriting with AR Rahman

BBC Proms 2009
Sunday 10.30am/7.30pm **Radio 3**

WORKING WITH RAHMAN was interesting. He's a Sufi and prays up to eight times a day. It's tricky writing a musical with someone who is always slipping out of the room to pray — it's like working with the Scarlet Pimpernel! So says Don Black, Oscar-winning lyricist about his time working with India's greatest living composer, AR Rahman, on the musical *Bombay Dreams*. As an

introduction to Indian music, it takes some beating.

"I fell in love with the whole culture," he reveals. "Working with the 'Mozart of Madras' — as Rahman is known — was incredible. There is something about working with a Bollywood composer — it's mystical and magical music and it seems to come from another place, with a different vocabulary. You can't help dancing to it, or at least tapping along."

On Sunday, more than a few people will be tapping along too as the BBC Proms holds its first ever Bollywood Prom, an all-singing, all-

CULTURAL COLLABORATORS
Oscar-winning lyricist **Don Black** and Indian composer **AR Rahman** who worked together on *Bombay Dreams*



dancing musical spectacular in the Albert Hall, hosted by popular Indian singer Shaan.

It's the culmination of a full day of Indian music — Indian Voices Day — that begins with morning ragas (a type of Indian classical music) from all over the subcontinent, before free folk music and dance events in Kensington Gardens in the afternoon. And as far as Black is concerned, it's another way of showing that Bollywood's time has come.

"An Indian night at the proms is the ultimate accolade, isn't it," he

proclaims. "It's such a great achievement for the Proms and it really endorses it as a culture."

ORGANISERS HOPE THAT as well as encouraging typical Prom-goers to try something they might be unfamiliar with, Indian Voices Day will bring a more diverse audience into the Albert Hall and lead them to other areas of classical music. Does this mean that Indian music has made the leap into British mainstream culture now? "It has certainly become more accessi-

ble," says Black. "*Slumdog Millionaire* has helped that, as did Andrew Lloyd Webber with *Bombay Dreams*. People have grown to love the charts to their collaboration/ reworking of Rahman's *Jai Ho* (*You Are My Destiny*), from the soundtrack of *Slumdog Millionaire* — that

"It's mystical and magical music... You can't help dancing to it"

it — it's Bollywood's time."

And it's not just at the Proms, either. The Pussycat Dolls have recently been gyrating at the top of

scooped the Oscar for best soundtrack and best original song this year — and it seems that nowhere's out of bounds.

"I can see Rahman doing big movies that have nothing to do with India," says Black. "Something epic like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* would work well. Indian composers can adapt and have such beautiful themes.

"There's a leitmotif that comes up a lot in Bollywood songs," he muses, "about people who go away to find fortune. They always come back. I wrote a line in my favourite ballad from *Bombay Dreams*: 'Sometimes standing still can be the best move you make.' It's a nice way of putting it. Another line in a song I wrote said: 'Precious gifts can come from empty hands' — in other words you don't need rubies and sapphires to be rich. There's something about Indian music that inspires this kind of philosophy."

DEEP AND MEANINGFUL it might be, but working with the maestro of Indian music wasn't all peace and serenity.

"It was nerve-racking actually," he admits, "We spoke a different musical language. But it brought out some brilliant writing — like *The Journey Home Is Never too Long* [from *Bombay Dreams*]. And being in London with Rahman was amazing. It's like being with Elvis. Michael Jackson had nothing on him — walking into an Indian restaurant with him makes you realise you're in the presence of a very big star."

Don is currently working on a musical of *Bonnie and Clyde*, due to open in California in November and hopes to bring back *Bombay Dreams* as a touring production in the UK next year. *Laura Dixon*



Ambridge diary

Everything you want — or need — to know about *The Archers* this week

Pity poor Ian, giggling partner of petulant uber-bore Adam, he's become Ambridge's second Unthreatening Gay and thus the confidante of the village's lovelorn straight women.

He's always hovering around, ready with delicious home-made scones and a sympathetic ear, as weepy ladies pour out their man-troubles. This week it's Helen (as played by Louiza Patikas, below) who turns to the blessed Ian for relationship advice. She's about to date Australian barman Leon, but is unsure of how to behave.

Maybe if Helen stopped being so prissy, she might get lucky. Her recent bizarre and inappropriate intervention in Annette and Jazzer's grubby couplings just made her look weird.

Elsewhere, Alan the No-Nonsense Vicar and his self-satisfied wife Smugsha are practicing camping in their garden. I will offer no further comment except to bemoan Smugsha's transformation from no-nonsense solicitor to wet wife.

And the Environment Agency has issued a flood warning for Home Farm, such is the force of Lillian's tears over Matt.

Even her long-suffering sister Jenny finds all of this moping around tiresome and tells Lillian to get a grip. About time too.

Alison Graham



ANYONE FANCY A CUPPA?

Tea and Biscuits Monday-Friday 3.45pm **Radio 4**



Ever since he can remember, Hardeep Singh Kohli's life has been unfolding around a cup of tea and a plate of biscuits. "There's something quintessentially British about a good strong brew with a cheeky wee sweet something. Biscuits belong with tea the way Radio belongs with Times. There are, however, some observations I have garnered on my sweet, wet journey through middle England."



1 England is a nation of dunkers. While there are a handful of naysayers, public opinion definitely favours the gentle and careful dipping of a biscuit into tea. It ought to be noted that certain biscuits present unique challenges to the dunk. A garibaldi has very little to offer by way of moisture acceptance, while a shortbread can easily be over-dunked and collapse into a residual mess.

2 I could equally divide England between those who live by the belief that milk ought to be decanted prior to the tea and those for whom milk addition is always a secondary procedure. There is no conclusive proof that either school of tea-making philosophy is more correct.



3 Although most of us are mug users, tea in china tastes better. This is a widely held and factually correct belief. I have no idea why this should be so — but it is.



4 We are generally inclined towards builders' tea, not generally accepting herbal brands as tea per se. (I encountered a lady in Watford called Karen who concocted a blend with a single regular teabag and an Earl Grey bag. I grew up enjoying the self-same tea.)



5 Almost every individual is very clear about their first choice of biscuit. The more traditional biscuits are still the most popular; the digestive, the shortbread, the bourbon all command great love. Surprisingly few tea drinkers had much time for the rich tea biscuit, which is more than a little ironic.

