

JIM REEVES

His music touched millions

Partab Ramchand

For innumerable Western music fans in India their idea of nirvana or total bliss is to close their eyes and listen to the velvety voice of Jim Reeves. His 54th death anniversary falls on 31 July and his 95th birth anniversary on 20 August, and as such it is a good time to remember the singer whose voice and words have touched millions of lives around the world. Among the many countries in which “Gentleman Jim” was popular, India and Sri Lanka rank very high. Outside of the US where he was born, Reeves enjoys unprecedented popularity in South Africa among Western singers; it would not be wrong to say that India and Sri Lanka are perhaps next on the list. It is reckoned that Reeves is probably the all-time most popular English language singer in the island nation but his overall popularity in India is not far behind. I well remember how in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Listener’s Choice programme over All India Radio Madras on Saturday nights



Jim Reeves

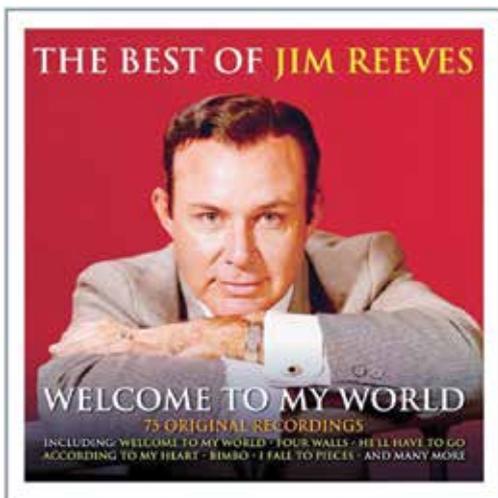
was not complete without numerous requests for a Jim Reeves song.

In Madras I have attended numerous “Jim Reeves Nite’s” over the years, either on his birthday or on his death anniversary, events are held to keep the peerless singer’s memory alive with a medley of his super hits. Clones of Jim Reeves belt out his melodious numbers or, even better, the originals are played on the soundtrack which is the ultimate in meaningful, sublime entertainment.

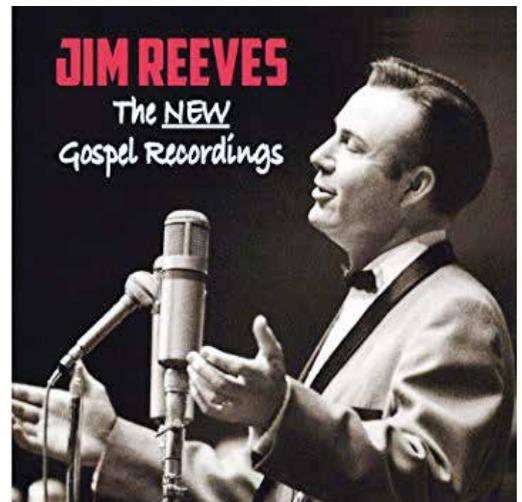
were almost always emotional. He has either lost the girl he loved, or is a victim of unrequited love and has been unjustly treated by the girl who has ditched him. It would appear that there is a lot of melancholy in Reeves’ songs, but he was able to convey the hurt through his rich baritone and apt usage of words. In his numbers the music stays in the background; it is the voice and words that are of utmost importance.

In India, Reeves continues to enjoy immense popularity more than half a century after his death. Among the Anglo-Indian community there is no function or event that does not feature a song or two by Reeves, and the following he enjoys is not restricted to one or two communities. Western music followers from a broad section of society have remained his fans, in some cases for well over 60 years, since his first big hit *Mexican Joe* was recorded in the mid fifties.

Our most humdrum days are best enriched by the voice of Jim Reeves.



When it comes to Reeves, it was very different from what constitutes entertainment today. There were no computer graphics, no laser lights, no razzle-dazzle, no fog lights or other special effects. “Gentleman Jim” held centrestage with his mellow voice, tuneful guitar and expressive words. In many ways Reeves was the Mukesh of the West for his songs



There is no question of swaying or dancing or doing a little jig when it comes to a Reeves number. You are just lost in the melody of that rich voice and the meaningful words and transported to an ethereal world as it were. And there are so many gems that one just does not know where to start and where to finish. His most famous numbers include *Guilty*, *Distant Drums*, *I Love You Because*, *Am I Losing You?*, *He'll Have To Go*, *Adios Amigo* and *Golden Memories and Silver Tears*, but then one can also be mesmerised by hits like *Four Walls*, *One Dozen Roses*, *Rosa Rio*, *Heartbreak in Silhouette*, *Welcome to My World* and *In the Misty Moonlight*. The list is long and there are some breezy numbers too in *Bimbo*, *Billy Bayou* and *Snowflakes*.

The voice of Jim Reeves is ideally suited for gospel numbers and at Easter or Christmas there is nothing better than to sit back, close your eyes and listen to his songs sung in praise of the Lord. Among his gospel numbers the best include the likes of *May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You*, *Mary's Little Boy Child*, *This World Is Not My Home* and *Take My Hand Precious Lord*. His versatility knew no bounds and he was at home while rendering



With Chet Atkins

Blues as well as gospel songs, though he is best remembered for his country western songs for which he figures in the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Reeves' words mirror life and touch us because the truisms he uttered reflect what we have been through. In *What's In It For Me* the line "There is no future in the past" besides being subtle is something we have come to believe in. Similarly, in *Golden Memories and Silver Tears* when he sings "Oh memory of love, bringing me pain, oh how sad to love, and love all in vain," there is something that tugs at our

heartstrings, for few among us would not have experienced it.

The ultimate tribute to "Gentleman Jim" is that his fan base keeps growing and even those who were not born when he died in a plane crash three weeks before his 41st birthday, keep humming or singing his songs (thanks mainly to YouTube) enraptured as they are by the twin qualities that made him an endearing artist—the mellifluous voice and the meaningful words.

(Partab Ramchand is a sports columnist, author and commentator)