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Free Press Journal	Mumbai	18/8/20	8	Ultra Media & Entertainment releases "Raat Ke MUSAafir" featuring Sona Mohapatra

# Sona, the storyteller!

Mohapatra is known to speak her mind and her music reflects the person she is as she sets the right tone to connect with her audience, writes **Bindu Gopal Rao**

**D**id you know that singer Sona Mohapatra has a B. Tech and MBA degree and held corporate jobs before taking up singing professionally? Well neither did I until I researched about her for this interview. The thinking, intelligent singer tells us more about her music that has always been beyond conventional Hindi film songs.

## Flashback

Sona grew up in an armed forces home and spent a significant part of her life travelling across the world including Nigeria where she spent four years of her life. "What was common was that my mom, a Physics lecturer and working woman always found a Hindustani

classical music teacher for us three sisters to learn music. In fact, it was then quite common for the community to learn some form of classical arts. I was lucky for this foundation. Our itinerant life exposed me not just to Hindi music, but a whole variety of genres of music: from gypsy romantic to *thumri* to flamenco to *ghazals* and all kinds of folk forms. I was a class topper and enjoyed academics and still believe that I am a nerd. I love to study, travel, learn and I have always been a curious person." Growing up in a non-political environment she says she is discovering

and deciphering new age politics that also show up in her performances. "On stage I am a storyteller and I like connecting dots and this is why my performances go up over three hours and yet my audiences appreciate and

call me repeatedly." Being someone who is opinionated, Sona had a specific vision of herself as an artiste and not just a playback singer and made the transition from corporate life to the singing world confidentially.

## Just music

What has held Sona in good stead is that she has always been clear that music to her is much beyond Hindi film songs which is why she decided to launch her own album Sona, on Sony Records, in 2007 that delves into several genres of music. "Since I do not have a typical sweet, saccharine voice I knew I was going to be pigeon-holed to sing item numbers so I decided to embark on a trajectory where I could sing the songs I wanted. In fact, I am happy to say that this has worked in my favour as I have lent my voice to romantic hit songs like *Jha Lage Na* from *Talaash*, *Naina* from *Khoobsurat* and *Ambar Saraiya* from *Fukrey*. I continue to release independent music regularly too."

Her new single *Raat Ke MUSAafir* showcases the struggles that women face in the context of safe spaces and is streaming on Ultra Media & Entertainment Group's YouTube channel. "This song is all about the triumph of the human spirit and sisterhood with an inspiring narrative that struck a chord with me as I have consistently stood up for causes like this."

Despite the current pandemic, Sona admits that the need of the hour is to connect with audiences by putting out original music regularly. Looking ahead she wants to bring her documentary film *Shut Up Sona* to Indian audiences. Directed by Deepthi Gupta this documentary is produced by Sona and has been showcased at festivals in Delhi, London, Rotterdam, Gothenburg and Hot Docs, North America's largest documentary film festival. As she waits for the time she can return to stage, she and her 14-member team is busy streaming her performances online in an aesthetically superior manner while she continues her *riyaz* of complex ragas daily. "I hope India shifts its culture of wanting music for free, that will give a boost to the Indian music scene," she signs off.

