

# THE TUNE OF SUCCESS

Actor, singer and lyricist — **Neha Saraf** has a lot of experience under her belt and was also recently seen in the Hindi theatre adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

**Rhea Dhanbhoora** talks to her about balancing several different careers and her love for theatre



>> Neha is comfortable being an actor, and singer as well as a lyricist

Still in her twenties, Neha Saraf has a lot to be proud of. With a bevy of songs (that she wrote herself), theatre performances and films in her kitty, she has a lot going for her. Her recent claim to fame is a collection of her songs that were recently featured in the woman-centric film *Gulaab Gang*. She also played Sauriya in Swanand Kirkire's musical *Aao Saathi Sapna Dekhe* and Phool Singh in Atul Kumar's *Piya Behrupiya*. She was a lead character in the film *Gaanja Kali*, based on Amrita Pritam's story and has been a part of big-budget film, *Heroine*. She is currently performing in *Barvi Raat*, a Hindi adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which was part of the World Shakespeare Festival in London. The versatile performer is as comfortable on stage and in front of the camera as she is acting in movies and being behind the scenes writing lyrics as well and even though she already has a lot to her credit, she isn't quite done building her portfolio yet! Here, she talks to us about films, acting and what she's looking forward to in the future.

**Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

I am an actor, singer and lyricist. I studied acting at the National School of Drama (NSD). I am also a theatre artist and have been involved in a lot of writing work.

**So, you're an actor, singer, lyricist — how did you manage to delve into so many different fields?**

At NSD, we were trained in all aspects of film making. So, I am used to managing several different things at the same time. The stage lured me since I was a child. I loved performing. I used to sing, dance, act and involve myself in everything to do with theatre. I used to participate in inter-school and inter-college competitions and I worked hard towards making my childhood dream turn into reality.

**Tell us about your association with theatre.**

I've been performing on stage since I was a child. I loved the applause I got after every performance and it encouraged me to perform better and pursue theatre professionally. A live audience appreciating your work makes it a memorable experience, every time you are on the stage.

**You're in the Hindi adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Tell us about how you got involved with the project and what audiences can expect from it.**

We've already participated in a festival in London, where participants from 37 countries showcased all of Shakespeare's plays. Honestly, I was really nervous because of the language barrier and the fact that everyone is so well versed with all his plays meant that there was no scope for mistakes. But, we were thrilled to see the amazing reaction. Everyone present there appreciated our efforts.

**You wrote songs for the folk album for *Gulaab Gang*. How did you land that project?**

In late 2010 or early 2011, Soumit Sen, Director of *Gulaab Gang*, and I were chatting and he told me that he is making a movie about Bundelkhand. I told him I am from Bundelkhand and one thing lead to another. After two more conversations over coffee, he realised that I know a lot about the culture, so he asked me to write songs for the film. I agreed and then wrote my first song for the film (*Dheemi Dheemi*). He loved all the songs that I wrote and has, in fact, even asked me to write songs for his next film, which I am currently working on.

**The film made waves for the two female protagonists that have been pitted against each other for the first time in Bollywood. Do you think it's important to make films**

**with women in leading roles and why do you think this hasn't been done yet?**

Definitely! It is important to make women-centric films. In fact, when I heard the script I thought to myself, now the hero will make an entry and the entire film will be hero centric, but I was happy to learn that the entire film was driven by women. This was one of the major reasons why I agreed to become a part of this film. We don't have a lot of women centric films. But, there was an era where there were films like *Mother India*. In fact in the '60s we had quite a few women centric films, later in the '80s and '90s, the focus shifted. Now, cinema is changing again, with films such as *Kahaani*, *Gulaab Gang* and *Queen*. Things are changing slowly, but it's happening.

**How did you go about composing for this film — how would you describe the songs in the album?**

The album is based on folk songs. I have written four songs, each with a different meaning, but a common soul. For example, there is this one song that is about them getting tired of fighting against the world but next morning they are all geared up to fight. The Holi song, *Rang se hui rangili Chidiya*, is inspired from my childhood memory of catching sparrows and painting them. Writing the songs for this movie gave me a flashback of my childhood.

## NEHA'S PICKS

**Favourite song from the album**

Composition wise it's the title track and lyrics wise it's *Chidiya*

**Biggest Inspirations**

My parents and my husband Amitosh Nagpal

**Ideal work lined up for the future**

Writing songs for Soumit's next film, working on another Shakespeare play and waiting for my child to turn a year old