

THE PRINCE OF RADIO

Rajesh Batra makes you wish you had a job like his. But then, you also need his passion.



Talk about infectious energy. It's 9.30pm when we drop in at the Radio Mirchi studio, tired and listless after a long workday. But five minutes of chatting with the show's host, seeing him talk away enthusiastically with his listeners, and play song after lively song on the airwaves – from the latest Himesh Reshamiya number to swinging-sixties OP Nayyar melodies – and we're right back into the groove!

That's the effect that Rajesh Batra has on you when you meet him doing the thing that he loves: entertaining the thousands of listeners who tune in to FM90.5 on Thursday nights, 9pm to midnight. And his 1000-watt smile is a bonus.

The first half of the programme, when the young generation of Indian-Australians keeps Rajesh company, is on offer when we manage to squeeze in a few questions between Sunidhi Chauhan and Shweta Pandit. "I am originally from Delhi – from Moti Nagar," Rajesh discloses, throwing us that winning smile again. "I arrived in Sydney in '99, and while Australia is a wonderful place, those early years were tough."

But being the charmer that he is, he soon managed to bag a good job in Australia. "I used to work in the supply chain department of a major Indian company, and that is exactly the work I do with Toshiba at this time," he reveals as he supplies his listeners with a fresh dose of entertaining banter on the latest Indian events on in Sydney, and adds a Bally Saggoo remix to his chain of entertainment. As we watch, he fields dozens of calls – but among his favourite fans is a pair of young Indian boys holed up in immigration detention.

"I have no idea how they go in there, and I'll probably never find out, but what I do know is that they are great guys!" he says, getting a bit emotional when he reveals the struggle that these youngsters are having to face, whatever its cause. His next song – a

Sonu Nigam number - is a special gift for one of these boys, who likes to hear romantic melodies that remind him of his girl back in India. It's enough to give us a heartache. We want to know how a supply chain guy got to do something as much fun as being a radio jock.

"Destiny," he says with a twinkle in his eye, adding "and also because it's something I am absolutely passionate about." We wait for more, but it is 10.15pm and time for Mehfil-E-Mirchi. Soon, the gentle strains of Ghulam Ali crooning about unrequited love crank out of the music system, and we are knee-deep in ghazal nostalgia.

"I co-hosted SWR FM in Blacktown early on," Rajesh says, "and later when I moved to Castle Hill, I got an opportunity with Cumberland Community Radio 2CCR-FM." And that is how Radio Mirchi was born. But Rajesh wears many hats, and he also tells us about his event management business, 'Sing Along Sydney', which lets him indulge in more of his passion when he is not live on the airwaves. He is also set to launch a new segment, called Mirchi Countdown, for his estimated 40,000 listeners.

For several minutes we are forgotten as Rajesh chats away on the air and on the phone as listeners call in with their requests. Soon, it's time for the Golden Oldies section, when timeless melodies flow like a breath of fresh air. Rajesh gazes at us as if he has just seen us and is trying to place us – and then that grin is mercifully back, and we feel welcome again. "A new, talented female voice," he says suddenly, and we look at each other, mystified. "I'm looking for a new female voice for Radio Mirchi," he repeats, clearing things up for us. "But naturally, there are problems in the search as this is a late night show. Please let your readers know that Radio Mirchi is just the

right place to showcase that hidden talent." We promise to do this, as Geeta Dutt sweetens the atmosphere like only she can, with "Bhanwara Bada Nadaan Hai".

The call-in crowd is back, and the phone rings like crazy as Rajesh takes call after call – many of them have no requests, but just want to have a few words with him. He's forgotten us again, and feeling

invisible we quietly take our leave. He nods absently in between playing a song from a Shammi Kapoor film and taking another call – suddenly, we feel as if we had been just an intrusion into three hours of absolute, total fun for Rajesh Batra.

But that is what happens when you are in love – with your work, and with 40,000 people all at the same time.

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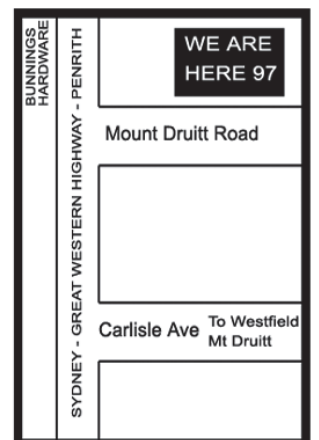
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