

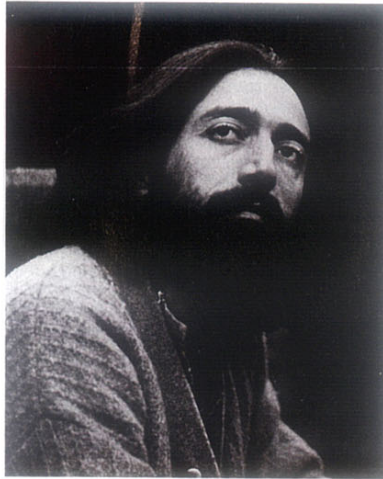
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**July 1998****Film****Preview****Wild is the wind**

Rajan Khosa bucks the Bollywood machine

**R**ajan Khosa's first feature must have seemed an unlikely candidate for the Audience Award at last year's LFF. Here was a story set in New Delhi, about a young singer's struggle to find her own voice within the daunting tradition of Indian classical music, and the almost mystical appearance of an innocent street-girl which helps her fulfil her quest. Hardly the most accessible subject matter for British viewers, you might think. Yet the punters' votes

really is quite a struggle for Indian artists to work out who they are. Pallavi in the film feels constantly that her voice is not individual. We see her at the stage in her development where she has to stop using technique as a crutch and start speaking from the soul. I wanted to show that you could find inspiration in a street-girl singing an old folk tune, if you allowed yourself to be open to that.'

Khosa would be the first to admit that his own path as a film-maker has not always been an easy one. Having made five acclaimed short films, he began writing his first feature-length screenplay, and won the Hubert Bals Award at the Rotterdam Film Festival to help the script into production. That however, was back in 1992, and despite the best efforts of his German producer Karl Baumgartner (who has also had a hand in diverse projects from Jarmusch's 'Dead Man' to Kusturica's 'Underground'), rejection letters started piling up. 'I think the whole struggle was not having the screenplay language to communicate my own ideas,' reflects Khosa, whose project gained a whole new impetus when English writer Robin Mukherjee re-shaped the screenplay and support began to come in from a variety of European distributors interested in showing the finished film.



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produced a poll-winner, a response, no doubt, to the piece's enfolding calm, its surprising sensuality and the sheer sincerity of expression that pours from every frame.

Indian-born but long resident in London, Khosa admits he made the film for the folks 'back home' who would be *au fait* with its musical and cultural references. 'But I always knew there was something universal in it,' he adds. 'I mean, it considers some of the central issues for any form of artistic enquiry, whether Indian or Western. What is creativity? How do you find your own place within a tradition? What do individuals contribute to the development of art forms through time?'

In the case of Khosa's heroine Pallavi (played by Indian TV soap superstar Kitu Gidwani), these questions are particularly acute; not only because of the way a singer's training in Indian classical music is passed down orally by the teacher, but because the teacher in this instance was her mother, who has just died. 'You depend totally on your teacher in these situations,' explains Khosa, who has balanced film school education at Pune in India and London's Royal College of Art with five years studying Indian philosophy. 'They are the ones who decide if you are ready to go on stage in three or five years time. So it

Eventually the money came from France, Holland and India's National Film Development Corporation, with the Brits (in the shape of the ever-enterprising Keith Griffiths of Illuminations Films) the last to come in.

Having shot the film in India with an Indian cast and crew, Khosa admits that his chief disappointment is the unlikelihood of the film receiving many screenings there, given the almost complete absence of an alternative distribution network outside of the Bollywood machine. What place is there, then, for such movies in India's cultural traditions, when the medium is only a century old and the work of many of India's greatest film artists (including Satyajit Ray) remains relatively unshown there? 'That's a difficult question,' he shrugs, 'but I think even as an Indian film-maker, it's still a question of what you carry inside you, the cultural experiences passed down through the generations. Take my father: he was trained in Western painting in an art school set up by the British, but his concerns are wholly Indian. Today the language of film is expanding at such a rate. An aesthetic like mine has something of the past in it, but it still can be part of that whole explosion of utterances. It's an exciting time.' *Trevor Johnston*  
*'Dance of the Wind' opens Fri at the Renoir.*