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*I'm a
director's
actor*
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Calling a spade a spade, singer and actor, **ANDREA JEREMIAH** talks about her future plans, past regrets, and staying true to herself in this ever-changing world to
Anjali Alappat

*S*n a red and blue sari, Andrea Jeremiah looks every inch a movie star. Her makeup is flawless, her hair perfect, and she is ready for her shot. Posing for the camera, she effortlessly charms everyone around her.

When Andrea made her debut on the silver screen in 2007, it was an entirely impulsive decision. A talented musician, she had been offered a seat at the prestigious Berklee College of Music, and was on her way to becoming a professional singer. But fate and Gautham Menon intervened, and she went on to star in her first film, *Pachaikili Muthucharam*.

Andrea has always been outspoken, something that is both, endearing and antagonistic in turns. Her first few years in the industry were not exactly smooth. In retrospect, she ponders over her choices. “On a bad day, I would regret it. And on a good day, I would probably think that fate has led me here, you know. So, how do you regret your choice unless you know what your life would've have been otherwise? Who knows? I may have ended in a gutter. I may not have even made it as a singer. You never know, right?” she says.



CARRYING A TUNE

But, Andrea has not relegated her singing career to the back seat. She has collaborated with big names like GV Prakash Kumar and Harris Jayaraj on playback compositions. With the beginning of a New Year, she says, "I don't know what to expect of myself at this point! I'm singing for a lot of new music directors in terms of playback singing. Not too many songs, but just whatever I find interesting." When we ask about her own work, she reflects, "I'm working on certain compositions, but India is not really supportive of independent music. Though I am an actor and a singer, it's still hard to get even one song of mine out. I shudder to think of what it must be like for people who aren't in this field, but are songwriters. It is incredibly difficult."

Stereotyping is another problem she faces with regards to her music. "It's a double-edged sword. If I get on stage, people expect me to sing 'google-google'. That's how it is, and that's the price I have to pay. So, I can't do my own music in a little bar because I've fallen into a stereotype, and there's a certain 'Catch 22' situation for me. I can't do the things that unknown, non-film based musicians can do," she says with dismay.

prince, signing off.

TAKING ON THE WORLD

And, this is not the only difficulty that Andrea has faced. Unlike many of her peers, she did not have a godfather to pave her way. "I would think having a godfather would influence your career. But, not having a godfather definitely does not influence your career! It just means that you work a lot harder and depend a lot more on yourself. Being good is not enough in this industry. It does prick when you sometimes think 'oh my god, that role is perfect for me,' and it doesn't come your way because of a whole lot of factors. So, you just have to believe that your time will come at some point."

Determined to do things her way, Andrea firmly believes in a 'normal' life. While still in college, she was offered several roles, but turned them down. Today, she cannot bring herself to regret the so-called 'wasted' time. "Being in this industry is crazy on so many levels, that the more 'normal' life you've had for as long as possible, the better for you. Because, I still don't know if I have made the right choices. I will never know," she says.



TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

What about the alleged romances and heartbreaks? "The truth is that the people who don't get written about have probably dated a lot more people than I have. Except that I'm more open about things. So, obviously people judge me. They judge me based on what they read, not based on what they know. And that's not very nice. But you know, you can't spend your life trying to change people's opinion about you. You've just got to be who you are, and people either love you or leave you alone. That's it!" she says defiantly.



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Andrea describes herself as a 'director's actor'. "It means that I don't come with any baggage. There is no expectation of 'I have to be seen only this way on screen'. I can be whatever the director wants me to be for that particular role, in that particular film," she explains.

Stories of stars throwing a tantrum run rampant in the industry. But, Andrea has never had a problem sharing screen time playing the second heroine. "How does it matter? Some of the biggest successes and the most successful actors have gotten a big break from multi-starrers. I don't think it really makes a difference. If you hold your own on screen, people will notice you, whether you're there for one minute or 10 minutes or an hour. As long as you make your impact, that's all that matters," she dismisses.

And she has a point. Some of Andrea's critically-acclaimed performances were in her supporting roles. "I could be missing out on a whole lot of great roles if I have such rigid ways of thinking, and I don't want to do that," she says.

Andrea has worked on quite a few enviable projects with some of the most famous directors in the industry. "I've worked with the best directors. The one person still on my list is Mani Ratnam. I have worked with good directors in the past, I am working with good directors at present, and I know for a fact that I will be working with good ones in the future also. I don't get the top heroes, but I definitely get the top directors. I think they have more of an impact on the film, so I'm happy," she says.



GOING BOLLYWOOD

With more and more actors trying to break into the lucrative Bollywood movie-making machine, it seems like a natural choice for someone like Andrea who has a diverse range of films under her belt. But, she disagrees, "I have enough trying to deal with everyday here, and I think Bollywood is a lot more aggressive. I'm not an aggressive person. I take things as they come. That doesn't mean I'm not hard-working. I work on myself, but I don't work on making opportunities happen. I'm not good with my PR, and I'm not good at getting things to come my way. I would never go chasing after Bollywood. I always think that it's better if you go somewhere on your terms rather than having to go there and work with people on their terms."

But, Andrea is not entirely averse to Bollywood. We asked her if she would consider doing an infamous 'item' number, and she is quick to reply, "First of all, I don't think anyone would ever ask me to do an 'item' number, because I'm a really cool singer, but dance?" she laughs, adding, "I loved the thing that happened in Delhi Belly. It was really quirky, and that kind of thing is really cool and interesting, and will work in any language. The one thing I respect about Bollywood is that they don't judge anybody. They don't judge themselves either. You are who you are, and I love that. I wish people here would grow up and get to that place."

ON WORKING WITH A LEGEND

Andrea's most-anticipated future project is her role in Vishwaroopam 2, the much-awaited sequel to Kamal Hassan's last big project. "I'm very happy with it," she says, not wanting to disclose much about it. She is however, eager to talk about her hero, Kamal Hassan. "He is the epitome of all things good in Indian cinema. His work ethics are just remarkable, and his energy is mind-blowing. I never get tired of saying this each time I see him. I don't know from where he gets this boundless energy. He just goes at it with everything he has got. He will never settle for anything but the best, and never compromise on the quality of his film, and that's just remarkable. So many people in his place could easily be complacent, but he's completely the opposite of that. He's just fantastic. And of course, he's a brilliant actor. There's no need to say anything more."

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LOOKING FORWARD

With such a healthy respect for directorial work, it would not be surprising if Andrea wanted a turn in the chair. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be part of her plan. "Directing is such a tedious job. People have no idea how difficult it is. If I were a director right now, I'd definitely want to shoot everybody. It takes a lot of patience to be one, that I don't have that right now. The one thing I've learned from life is, never say never. Because you never know, right? But, for the time being, no!"

On a signing note, Andrea shares with us that she would love to return to her roots in theatre acting someday, maybe in Broadway also if life takes her there... maybe return to her writing and poetry. Her plans are fluid as of now, taking things one day at a time. But, whatever she will be doing next, one thing is for sure, and that will be, 'Essentially Andrea'.

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