

Memory Lane 8

NID Days

Saul Bass and story of Zero!



The auditorium was new! It had interesting furniture. There were no foam cushioned chairs. Instead the chairs had jute rope woven on steel frame. They could be folded in place for walking through when people were not sitting. There were no arm rests. But one could fold their legs akin to a squatting posture if one wanted to. They were Indian designs in many ways!

But in front of us was an American graphic designer! He had deep mystical eyes!

Saul Bass who set a new trend in making title films for Hollywood movies, had visited NID (during 1967-69). We were eagerly waiting to listen to him. ! As it was the practice the talk was open to all students and staff of NID! Even Gautam Sarabhai the Chairman of NID used to attend such presentations. Saul Bass Came for a short trip of a week or less! Students like me and fiery Subrato Bhaumik in Textile design were rather critical of such short trips at high cost. India was still counting on each dollar when it came to foreign exchange at that time!

But now I realise the importance of such leading designers coming to NID at that time! We were put into World League in design exposure, thereby getting roped to deliver world standards, with no excuses of a poor developing Country!

NID made us aware of our cultural and intellectual richness! More Western designers came, stronger we became inside, with a deep desire to excel and shine as 'Indian designers'!

It is a great vision of 'Sarabhais' to build such a foundation! We, the small number of students were the conduits for such rich 'design inputs' though we didn't fully realize its importance at that time!

Saul Bass started his talk. He showed us "Benhar" posters which he had designed for the classic film based on the Biblical story. We all had seen it already. We didn't know that all the graphics for the film came from Saul Bass!(I still am unable to get any reference on the web). He also introduced us to the new trend of making the title sequence by graphic designers for the main films! In fact he was one of the pioneers of this unique trend for which he became well known later!

His approach to 'title sequences' of the film is fascinating!

It seems he started with making the dull credit titles moving in the beginning! This opened the whole 'graphic world' to entertainment Movies . Elements of design like line, form and composition got a new positioning. They not only made a new introductory statement powerfully but also started conveying the spirit of the film. Abstract images could tell the main theme with a single powerful graphic image which remained in people's mind as a symbol . In 'The Man with Golden Arm ' the title sequence designed by Saul Bass powerfully projects a jagged hand.

As he said in an interview with Herbert Yager', ' his graphic work (the title) in its jagged form expressed the disjointed, jarring existence of the drug addict.'

He was able to abstract the essence of the film and project it in a powerful way to comprehend the whole in a simple way!

The symbol stayed in our minds and gave us a message like a diagram of heart would tell us the working of a flushy actual heart!

The list of films he worked for over the years is impressive:

*The Man With The Golden Arm
In Harms Way
West Side Story
It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World
Nine Hours to Rama
The Big Country,
The Victors
Grand Prix*

Seconds
Walk on the Wild Side
Vertigo
Psycho
Good fellas

No wonder he was an Oscar Award Winner

You can see more of his work and about his work in many articles/interviews written on his work.

see

<https://medium.com/art-science/saul-bass-on-his-approach-to-designing-movie-title-sequences-47fd537c457b>

[How Design Legend Saul Bass Changed Film and TV Forever WIRED](#)

Saul Bass also was fond of making films on his own .

He showed us a film on origins of creativity, which he had made on his own initiative! After the short film, my finger went up!

“Sir, what you showed in the film about invention of ‘Zero’ is not correct! Arabs didn’t invent the zero! It was in India, Zero was invented!”

His film had a 'shot' where Arabs were discussing in a group'. ‘Zero’ and Numeral’s come out !

Actually Saul Bass at that time was not aware of the well recognized fact about zero! He kept quiet.

Only when I raised my finger again to ask him about another detail after his next film, he said, ' **Ha! we have trouble again!**'

Second time there was no trouble but an earnest query to know from a *great graphic designer!*
