JOY: Jay Sean with his awards by ADITI KHANNA

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE lever caught up with the Asian music scene when AR Rahman added yet another trophy to his collection. The double Oscar-winning music maestro was honoured with an Outstanding Achievement Award by B4U Music at the UK Asian Music Awards (UKAMAs) last Thursday (5). Rahman was there to present his award and also to accept his own for the Best International Album award, presented at the Royal Festival Hall in London amid performances by some of the biggest Asian acts from Britain and the US, including Hung-Ti-H-Dhami and Nisha Katarka. But ultimately it was Jay Sean’s right, who walked away with three awards for Best Male Act, Best Album and Best Urban Act.

It is not unusual to see Rahman in London, and his new album, My Own Way, that got the 27-year-old R&B star most excited. “This one means the most as it comes after a gap of three years. I produced it on my own and label it a record deal with a big label like Cash Money,” he said. Music producer Rishi Rich, who bagged the Commitment to the Scene award, presented an impressive lineup of singers under his Rishi Rich Productions banner, such as Mumzy, Tasha Tah, Veronica and H-Dhami.

The annual event, hosted by singer-actress Karen David and BVU VJ Salil, was packed with music fans, with organisations claiming the credit crunch had not affected ticket sales. “In times of economic turmoil, creativity flourishes as people become even more selective in what they release as record labels, and what they buy as customers,” said8 Teal Ha- dio 1 presenter Nihar Arhanayake. 8 presenter Bobby Friction, who won the award for his BBL Indian Network radio show, summed up the awards: “Just because there is no bhanga in the Top 10 charts, it does not mean that British Asian music is dead. In fact, it is more alive than ever.”

BOLLYWOOD MUST SHOW VISION

IT appears as though everyone was riding that Slumdog Millionaire feel-good wave.

But almost suddenly Bollywood finds itself staring at the abyss, relatively speaking. Of course, Shah Rukh Khan or Kareena Kapoor are unlikely to find themselves destitute, even if producers want them to slash their fees. But the success that is Bollywood seems to have come to an abrupt halt, like a lot of other things in India now. What’s different is that for the first time, Bollywood studios in the UK are having to make cut backs. Their business model has been one of almost uninterrupted growth, with many paying increasing attention to the market outside India, when once upon a time it was no more than an indigent afterthought. There is a danger that they will retreat now inwards and focus exclusively on the home market. That would be a mistake. The UK needs Bollywood, even if Bollywood is cooler about the West. It is a creative, financial, dynamic, practical relationship that the success of Slumdog has thrown a brilliant spotlight on. There is no reason why Indian filmmakers can’t produce the sort of film that could work for a global audience in the way that Slumdog does. Of course, it demands a certain risk – just as director Danny Boyle took when he made a film in a country he did not know and with a largely foreign crew (to him).

In many areas, Asian educational achievement in the UK ranks among the best, and increasingly, the last frontier. There are increasing numbers of Asian educated students in the UK, but few of them see a role in the UK. As more people keep on moving to the UK, there are groups out there now pushing young scientists and engineers, but they need more in the way of plot and characterisation. Of course, it demands a certain risk – just as director Danny Boyle took when he made a film in a country he did not know and with a largely foreign crew (to him).

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REVEAL AMONG MEN

The difficult ability to forgive is being lost in a world where violence is predominant, but it is needed now more than ever before, argues the author of a new book, No Enemy To Conquer.

FOR an author to find that the events making the subject matter of his book are even more relevant should be a source of satisfaction.

For me, in many ways, it is not. The war-torn violence in Lahore and Mumbai (picture) will surely make forgiveness more needed than ever before, but it will also make it more difficult, and the demonising and blaming will be more widespread.

It has been my good fortune, over the years, to report on humankind at its best, not its worst, and since my younger days in South Asia, I have been able to tell the world some of Asia’s reconciling initiatives. Indeed, my first article, in 1952, was for a Calcutta (now Kolkata) newspaper, and my first book, in 1972, was From India With Hope.

The title of my new book is No Enemy To Conquer, which Hindus will know recalls the moment when Rama, the divine prince, reminds us of the chariot which will lead to victory: valour and fortitude are its wheels, truthfulness and virtue: conduct its banner, strength, discretion, self-restraint and benevolence are its four horses, harnessed with the cords of forgiveness, compassion and empathy. ‘Whosoever has this righteous chariot, has no enemy to conquer, has no enemy to conquer.’

One of the first stories I wrote for No Enemy To Conquer was about a Muslim friend in Gujarat, Bandhu Bandukwala. Despite just escaping with his life, he continues to stand up for his community without a trace of bitterness. He even refused to name the policemen who had joined a mob in burning down his home. After the 2002 riots, he emailed me that if the passion for revenge can be turned into reconciliation and brotherhood, the world will have gained a great deal.

Another is about a Hindu friend, Sushohar Barve, from Mumbai. She works for reconciliation in Kashmir and with Pakistan began with facing up to the ‘invisible wall’ she had allowed to grow between herself and a Muslim fellow student. ‘Since that day, prejudice towards Muslims has never entered my heart. I realised that if understanding was not to come between communities, I must try to understand history from their viewpoint. In this book, I would like Gandhi with his hands wide open, and to my book, the Dalai Lama writes, “When something terrible happens, instead of finding some individual or group to blame, fostering hatred and a desire for revenge, we should try to take a broader view and consider the longer term. Much more constructive and than finding feelings of resentment and revenge is to forgive and transform the negative event and its consequences into a source of inner strength.”

No Enemy To Conquer, Michael Henderson, Baylor University Press/Alma Books, £10.99, out this month.

THE VOICE OF BRITISH ASIANS

March 13, 2009

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