



A MAKEOVER FOR MARILYN

In restoration studios across the country, Hollywood classics are getting a new life

Chandrasekar likes contributed to the Bogart and Marilyn he has, and that he to these movies, a him a special place ter all, not many get to work with day.

Crouched in front of big members scan images, of There's a flicker of Monroe in th of No Return, the image du scratches. But at this restoration ion studios in Nandambakkam are at hand for the anti-ageing t "I tell them to be extra careft my girl," says K Chandrasekar, buff and restoration artist. Chandrasekar owns a collection of 2,500 films, both Indian and world cinema, and tells us that he is usually found in theatres lf not on his seat.

Timeless they might be, but movies from the past are more in danger than pelicans in the oil-spilled Gulf of Mexico. The nitrate films are notoriously high-maintenance, and are unlikely to survive beyond a certain period even with all the precautions.

Hence, world over, film-makers are packing off their movie collections to restoration studios to be converted into digital formats, and a substantial

finally recording all 134 minutes back to 35mm Eastman colour negative.

"We had been commissioned by Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation for this project," said a spokesperson from Prasad EFX. Over the last two years, the studio has successfully restored and digitised 12 Academy Award winners, seven Golden Globe Award winners, including works like *Young And Innocent* (1937), *Fistful Of Dollars* (1964), *The Harder They Come* (1972) and *That's The Way Of The World* (1975).

The price point is what makes Hollywood production houses turn to studios in India. On an average, restoring a film here costs between Rs 20 lakh and Rs 50 lakh. Converting it to a Blu-Ray format costs an additional Rs 5-6 lakh. "It is 50 per cent cheaper for them to get their films restored by us," says P Caesar, chief operating officer of Filmlab, which operates its digital restoration



World over, film-makers are packing off movie collections to studios to be converted into digital formats and a substantial part of the traffic is heading here

part of the traffic is heading to India where those like Chandrasekar are working on the frames making them as good as new.

"I myself am a fan of commercial films (Tamil and Hindi) but when I was working on some parts of the first version of *King Kong*, the one made in 1933, I was curious to watch the whole film. After two years of restoration work, I have started looking at movies from a different perspective altogether," says Thasleema Fathima, a 22-year-old restoration artist.

"In this studio, we have restored titles and 12 Indian ones, the oldest For instance, when the restored version of the Oscar-winning 1948 Hollywood musical-drama *The Red Shoes* was screened at the classics section of the Cannes Film festival last year, the role a handful of technicians from Prasad EFX studios in Saligramam, Chennai, had played in its second life remained unknown. In early 2008, Prasad EFX began digitally scanning 5.79 lakh individual frames of the movie, re-registering the colours, removing visible specks and scratches, and

facility in Goregaon East, Mumbai. Thirty per cent of the work Filmlab gets are international projects.

"It costs between \$100,000 and \$120,000 to restore and digitise a film and format into Blu-Ray in the US. It can be done within half that amount or lesser here because the labour costs are much lower," says Rohan Desai, head of restoration at Prime Focus, Mumbai.

In 2007, Prime Focus started with the "complete restoration" and Blu-Ray DVD conversion of a Jet *The Godfather* (1993) and has so far restored The list includes *Rumble in the* (1996), *King Lear* (1971), *Dances* (1991), *The Legend* (1985), *The* *Place in the Sun* (1951). Prime Focus-off-point" facilities in Los New York and Canada, where film negatives and get them format.

India also have an edge in terms he Pixion studios in Chennai, cians, can restore films up to 6k s up to six times clearer than the ner Brothers Motion Picture Los Angeles mostly handles 4k

resolutions. The Prime Focus facility in Goa has over 70 restoration machines and employs over 200 people. The Warner studios have 10 machines, not enough to handle the large volume of work.

"We get the movies on hard disks and tapes, which are first scanned. Then a software does the initial cleaning, removing the dust and other particles from the frame. Though this is automatic, we have to do a manual check frame by frame to ensure that nothing from the original is lost in this process. Restoration is a process that is completely faithful to the original," says Thirugnanam.

Back at the studio, Chandrasekar shares his memories of working on the Hollywood classic *On the Waterfront*. "There is a special feeling, an elation of having worked on a masterpiece, helped it live longer," he says.

Top: Inside the Pixion studio in Chennai; [above] stills restored by Prime Focus