

Celebrating Life and Legacy through Sri Lanka's First Musical Biopic

Posted on

Clarence: Rhythm of the Guitar is a heartfelt celebration of hope, where love and music rise above all.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.



Clarence: Rhythm of the Guitar is a cinematic tribute to a musical legend, Clarence Wijewardena.

Clarence – Rhythm of the Guitar is a captivating musical biopic, the first in Sri Lanka. It shines a light on the timeless appeal of an era's soundscape. At its heart is Clarence Wijewardena, the trailblazing father of Sinhala pop music, whose visionary genius charted a bold new course for Sri Lankan entertainment. It was as though Clarence was destined to be the pioneer of progressive music, introducing Sri Lankans to a vibrant sound they had never before encountered. His songs radiated cheer and optimism, with lyrics harmonizing seamlessly with his upbeat, infectious melodies.



Clarence's artistic journey and romantic angle combine to create a portrayal of life, love, and legacy.

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Damith Wijayathunga and Nihari Perera tell the love story of Clarence and Sheela poignantly

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The film's rhythmic narrative makes it a heartwarming and evocative experience. Unravelling a pivotal chapter in Sri Lanka's musical history, the story traces Clarence's rise from modest beginnings to becoming a beloved figure in recording studios, where producers quickly recognized the powerful resonance of his music with the public.

Woven into this musical journey is a tender love story delicately fictionalized for cinematic appeal, yet never straying far from the essence of the tale the film seeks to tell. The romance and the music move harmoniously, enhancing each other in a graceful flow that lends emotional depth to the narrative. There's a profound gentleness in both Clarence's artistic journey and his romantic angle, blending into a moving portrayal of life, love, and legacy.

The casting is impeccable. From youthful exuberance to seasoned depth, the ensemble brings remarkable nuance to the screen, capturing a spectrum of emotions with heartfelt conviction. Damith Wijayathunga and Nihari Perera shine as Clarence and Sheela, breathing life into their characters with authenticity and charm while Dinakshie Priyasad plays the role of Indrani Perera and Saranga Disasekera as Annesley Malewana. They are supported by a vibrant cast of emerging and veteran talent who together dramatize Clarence's life and musical evolution with finesse. While certain aspects of the story are artfully compressed and fictionalized to heighten its cinematic appeal, the film remains a tender tribute—one of the most poignant and beautiful stories ever crafted around the music that has defined a nation.

Importantly, the movie begins with Annesley Malewana—Clarence's close friend and collaborator—who, alongside Clarence, co-founded the Moonstones in the late 1960s, bringing together the trio of Clarence, Annesley, and Indrani Perera, who

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produced songs that became instant hits and remain popular today, writing their story. The film highlights the creative partnership and the deep bond between Clarence and Annesley, whose shared passion for music united them even in the face of family disapproval of their chosen path. From the beginning, the film reveals Annesley's deep presence in Clarence's musical journey and personal life.

At the same time, the film's narrative has been thoughtfully woven around Clarence's songs, bringing them to life through beautifully crafted stories. It portrays poignant moments with heartfelt sensitivity, offering a soulful portrayal of the man and his music. Through artistic finesse, the film weaves love, heartbreak, and humor themes with emotional resonance and depth. There is no violence in the movie, to the extent that even the villain is not such a badass. From buying his first box guitar, inspired by Annesley, to pursuing Sheela until the end, the film portrays a friendship that transcends music. Through Clarence's highs and lows, Annesley's narration tells a story of unwavering support that encouraged him to persevere. The blossoming love between Clarence and Sheela is depicted with pure elegance, capturing a tender, trusting, and genuine connection. Viewers also learn that Clarence's songwriting never occurred in a vacuum; each song was inspired by real stories, people, or experiences. The film offers revealing answers for those curious about the origins of these timeless tracks. Additionally, the movie uncovers how Clarence and Annesley chose the names for their bands, deepening the audience's connection to these iconic songs and fostering a genuine fondness for their legacy.



How it all began with the guitar.



Damith with Dinakshie Priyasad and Saranga Disasekera who portray Indrani Perera and Annesley Malewana in the movie.

Equally pivotal to the film are its locations, meticulously chosen and transformed—not as 21st-century landmarks, but as living, breathing spaces that capture a time before the advent of television in Sri Lanka. The movie's settings evoke the essence of an earlier era, complete with its architecture, atmosphere, and way of life. They breathe life into the story, enhancing the emotional depth,

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shaping the mood and the scene, adding authenticity, visual richness, and narrative power. Allowing the audience to immerse themselves in Clarence's journey, the film cleverly captures authentic period details – the costumes, settings, language, and technology, strengthening the narrative.



The movie portrays a beautiful fusion of romance and music.

From the box guitar to the electric, the film captures the evolution of the men and their music brilliantly, from the 1960s Moonstones to the 1970s Super Golden Chimes. The actors relive the past with effortless flair and undeniable chemistry, demonstrating why they reigned supreme and captured the hearts of audiences across the island with their songs. The most famous songs are replayed, revealing stories that spurred their composition. Watching and listening to Clarence's songs is nostalgic; it also shows the depth of his brilliance, his ability to experiment, and his boldness to revolutionize Sinhala music entertainment in Sri Lanka. The film also portrays Clarence's challenges on his musical journey, most notably when the SLBC hierarchy refused to air his catchy, upbeat songs on the Sinhala Service. Vijaya Corea defied the norm, boldly daring his superiors to stop him from playing them on the English Service. The story further highlights the influential figures who supported and shaped Clarence's pioneering path in music, including Sri Sangabo Corea, Vijaya Corea, and Gerald Wickramasooriya, the founder of Surya Records, under which the Moonstones released their early albums.

The film was produced by Thusitha Wijayasena, a renowned entrepreneur and founder of the KCC—a lifelong fan of Clarence Wijewardena, whose formative years coincided with the golden age of Sri Lankan musical bands. Inspired by this deep admiration and nostalgia, he envisioned a grand cinematic tribute capturing a defining chapter in Clarence's life. It was to be no ordinary production, but a landmark film crafted with exceptional attention to quality and cutting-edge technology.

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Set against vibrant melodies and rich harmonies, the romance unfolds with charm, drawing viewers into the characters' emotions.

He entrusted director Theja Iddamalgoda with the project to bring this ambitious vision to life. Filming began in January 2023 with great promise. However, midway through production, an unexpected setback struck—the director had to step away due to illness. It was a crushing moment for the team, especially for Thusitha Wijayasena. Yet, with unwavering resolve and a “never say never” spirit, he rallied his top managers and, in close collaboration with the film’s technical crew, pushed forward against the odds. The result is nothing short of remarkable. Produced to the highest standards and certified with Dolby Atmos sound, the film is a testament to passion, perseverance, and the power of music to inspire even in the face of adversity. For Thusitha Wijayasena, the journey was worth it. It was yet another challenge he overcame, and he is living to see its success. More than anything, the movie that brings Clarence’s inimitable music to life is an attempt to immortalize memories for future generations. The movie has just made its international debut, reaching audiences who fondly remember Clarence’s heartfelt and uplifting songs, which defined a musical renaissance in Sri Lanka.



Producer Thusitha Wijayasena’s unwavering resolve saw the completion of a movie of the highest standards.

Portraying Clarence’s story through the lens of hope and love has spun an enduring tale around the man and his music, a remarkable milestone as Sri Lankan cinema completes 78 years. Music and creativity poured naturally from Clarence. He was a composer, gifted lyricist, and collaborator. Whether penning his own words or bringing other writers’ verses to life, Clarence crafted melodies that have become

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timeless classics. Clarence – Rhythm of the Guitar is a timely tribute, dedicated to preserving his quintessential music for future generations.