

*Manohari Singh, the versatile reedman and arranger was the sheet anchor behind the creative R D Burman. He had a strong sense of harmonic structure and scripted written scores for a variety of instruments. Playing alto and soprano saxophones, clarinet and flute, he arranged almost everyone of R D's tunes on all of the films that they worked together and soloed on most of them. Here, he talks about his life and experiences, his colleagues and what it was like in the halcyon days of the hindi film music world.*

*Q How did you become a multi reed player?*

I come from a family of musicians originally from Khatmandu. At Age 7. I picked up the flute. My father played in an orchestra for a British audience. My growing years were in Batanagar near Calcutta where I came under the wing of a Czech reedman, Joe Newman and learnt clarinet. I played my first concert at Age 14. In Batanagar there were so many Czechs the environment was rich with talented musicians who worked in the shoe factory. We were made to practice hard and perfect the instrument, the scales. Discipline was rigorous and as a result we reached high levels of performance at a young age.

I moved to Calcutta and played for the New Theatre where Pankaj Mallick was a prominent figure. So were Kamal Das Gupta and Hemant Kumar. The night club scene was active at the time and we played in dance music bands there. Louis Banks uncle was one of the musicians. So from Western classical to pop and dance music to Bengali geet I was exposed to all kinds of music forms.

*Q Who brought to Mumbai and how did you get your first break?*

Salil Chowdhury persuaded me to come here. I landed in '58 and my colleague Basu had come earlier. I searched, but for a long time there wasn't much work. Anil Biswas was no longer in demand and I tried with others with little success. S D Burman finally gave me my break with 'Sitara se Aagey'.

*Q Which are the most memorable films that you played in and arranged ?*

It is difficult to single out but what comes to mind was 'Insan Jaag Utha' 'Chotte Nawab', 'Bhoot Bungla' 'Love Story'. I remember 'Love Story' very sadly. RD had passed away and Basu da and I completed the score and the music in a sorrowful frame of mind. What had the most impact on me are 'Guide' and 'Tere mere Sapne'

Doing the background music for 'Burning Train' then 'Jewel Thief'. Doing 'Bandini' is what I remember fondly.

*Q What was the relationship between you the late SD and RD, your fellow musicians and others in the industry*

It was a collaborative effort at all times. I was helped by my colleagues Basu and Maruti Rao. We all worked together it was a family.

The musicians too were thoroughly professional and we were all friends. I have many friends who played the same instruments as me and we all had a lot of fun together.

*Q And what was the experience of arranging and recording ?*

We had between 60- 80 musicians in the orchestra and as arrangers we wrote the score and organized each one's roles. They were all highly disciplined and played perfectly. We started at 9:00 sharp with no delays and rehearsed for four hours. It was a very satisfying experience. We used about 30 violins, violas, 6 cellos, 16 brass instruments (trumpets, trombones), reed instruments like flutes, clarinet, then there were guitars, mandolins (You know Laxmikant was a great mandolin player!) about 15 rhythm instruments like dholaks, drums, tympanis, and bongos. And we had to manage them and ensure a perfect finish from them.

R D was very keen on a rich big band sound. We went to America and visited Detroit and heard the band of Stan Kenton live. It was wonderful.

Most of the musicians came from well trained, solid background. There were in all about 8 microphones only. Nowadays you have one for each instrument and all kinds of special effects.

The sound engineers like Kaushik, Minoor Katrak, Robin, B N Sharma were veterans and captured those sounds on the equipment of that time. You tell me how does the music of that period sound ?

*Q Who were the other arrangers like you whom you would like to mention.*

Sebastian was great. He used 40 violins and did some wonderful memorable work. Pyarelal too was a genius.

*Q Other than SD and RD whom did you work for?*

I worked with O P Nayyar and Salil Chowdhury.

*Q You are an accomplished jazz musician. .Which jazz musician influenced you ?*

Yes I was influenced first by Artie Shaw on clarinet and then Benny Goodman. On alto sax my idol was Johnny Hodges and it was a great experience playing 'Moonlight Serenade' by 'Glenn Miller' at midnight in darkness in the old days in Calcutta.

*Any fellow musicians you would like to mention?*

There were so many great ones Narvekar and Karnad on violins,George Fernandes on trumpet,the Lord brothers,Kersi Buggie who played drums, vibes. Father Cawas Lord even played bagpipes.Anibal was excellent on guitar as well as trombone.



*Manohari with Joe Gomes*

*Q How would you say that honours should be shared for creating a song?*

50% should go to the arranger and the musicians and the other 50% to the director, singer and lyric writer.It is everyone's effort.

*Q Finally, do you think the golden era of hindi film songs can return? With the kind of music heard nowadays will the wheel turn full circle?*

No chance ! That era will never come back. How many people will you find learning violin or clarinet and who has the patience ? The culture has changed and so have the times.

Sumant Raj flautist   Mohamed Rafi   Manohari Singh   Hari Prasad Chaurasia flautist

(Sumant Raj was the most talented , least known, now no more)





Maruti Rao tabla    Bhanu Gupta guitar    Louis Correa Cello    Basu Chakraborty Cello

Manohari Singh R D Burman

(The cello is exclusively used in western classical and jazz music and was brought to hindi films by Anthony Gonsalves and Sebastian D' Souza. Its now extinct in the hindi film music world)

Both pics courtesy Manoharii's personal collection