

The Heritage of the old Hindi Film Song

By Ashwin Panemangalore

Circa 1956 C Ramachandra the prolific film music director (a misnomer for composer) has been entrusted with the score for 'Aasha'. One of the songs calls for a fun and spice melody designed to titillate the senses. CR immersed in creative thought in his music room, is distracted by his kids playing outside. Distraction turns to interest. He captures the Eeni Meeni which becomes 'Eena Meenathis soon enfolds into " Eena Meena Deeka."

He shares it with his assistant John Gomes. Together they create "...Eena Meena Deeka.. De Dai Damanika..". John being a Goan adds the ' maaka naka ' ('I don't want' in konkani). The lyric develops, longer on each phrasing, gathering tempo till "ram pam po." John is ecstatic. He promptly whistles an elegant 16th note 4 bar bridge and notates it immediately. Later he employs a 2 man saxophone section for the part. The voices come on to finish the 1st chorus to the infectious rhythm. "Eena Meena Deeka" is born. Many 'Aasha' showings later the song is on everyone's lips. The film is eventually gone but, with apologies to Irving Berlin... the melody lingers on.

Circa 2006 The JJ Bhabha theatre. A 16 piece German big band is wading through a string of Broadway hits, strange to most in the audience. The band soon strikes the notes of 'Eena Meena Deeka' specially arranged for them by the Mumbai maestro, Louis Banks. A roar of recognition lights up as the audience delightedly surprised, claps and foot taps its way through the song. Banks however has not been content just to reproduce the melodic line.. Individual scores painstakingly created and written for brass and reed sections act as counterpoint, add body and a new feel to the song conceived by CR, which was thin on instrumentation. The original has been transformed into an orchestrated piece written specially for this band and its individual players but with the same lilt and feeling generated by the composer. Banks' arrangement of the composition has given it his own identity.

What makes this song and so many others of that era between the 40s and the 70s cherished two generations later, across waves of contemporary hindi film music most of which are forgotten quicker than the waves die. The old hindi film song stands like a monument on the shore weathered by the winds of time and the gentle lap of these waves to be admired across generations.

And there are many such monuments along an endless musical shoreline built by a legion of architects, engineers and craftsmen who valiantly worked with their age old tools creating priceless works of art each unique in shape, form and styling to create a rich heritage of that golden era of the music.

And who are they ? Enshrined in the media and in memory are the architects.. the music directors .. Naushad, C Ramachandra, Shankar Jai Kishan , Madan Mohan, N Dutta, Usha Khanna, S D Burman, Jaidev, O P Nayyar and later RD, Laxmikant Pyarelal, Kalyanji Anandjisupported by their famous lyricist partners like Shakeel, Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri,Qamar..... enhanced by the lilting voices of the legends Lata, Asha, Geeta Dutt, Kishore Kumar, Manna Dey,Talat, Mukesh, Hemant Kumar,Mohamed Rafi....

But architects alone cannot build an edifice. They require a band of engineers and craftsmen dedicated to the task who will transform the architects ideas into exotic reality of a song comprising orchestra and singer to produce a rich listenable tapestry of sound . Some of these orchestras which accompanied the legends on those famous compositions spawned 40 and at times 60 musicians performing on a variety of musical instruments ranging from Indian to Latin to Western popular and Western classical.The result you have violins, sarangi or sitar, trumpets, clarinet, saxophones , piano ,guitar, Indian bamboo flute, double bass, congas, western drums. Each instrument has its own space its own role which the arranger used to distinction.



C Ramachandra (center) with John & Joe Gomes

Consequently, each song represented a rich unparalleled texture of music singularly unique in its creative output of outstanding melody, blended harmony, engaging lyrics, ethereal voice and delectable rhythm. The lyricists were scholars and poets from UP largely Muslim, while the composers and directors were from parts of the North mostly Hindu. The arrangers who were often Goan had the skills to notate music (translate the ideas of the composer into sheets of written notations which a schooled musician could read and play) and create harmonies.

The perfect blend of each of these talents made for the everlasting value of the old hindi film song. Examine the cross section of those who populate the current film music world and it is not difficult to determine the cause of the lack of durability of today's output.



Mark Machado (piano) with John, Joe, Francis Vaz and others in rehearsal

Listen closely to the songs of that era, for example the songs made famous by Talat. The music is rich with a variety of instruments playing counterpoint. The fills in the space between the lines of an antara and the stanzas are engaging. And the strings in the background serve as velvet backing to Talat's voice.

During the same period worldwide, bands had typically, 16 piece orchestras across a narrow spectrum of instruments, brass (trumpets, trombones), reeds (saxophones, clarinets) and rhythm (bass, drums). Names like Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller hit the marquee. Stan Kenton in America was hailed a great big band leader with 40 pieces, sometimes up to 70. Kenton has carved out his name in the history of American popular music. Thanks to the practice there to recognize arrangers and document such contributors, Nelson Riddle and Billy May who arranged music for the singing greats like Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald have carved out their name in the history of American popular music.

Ask any avid listener of old hindi film songs about who arranged that music or what was behind the director and the singer. Chances are, he would not have even thought about it.

And this, when these arrangers utilized their imagination across a wider range of instrumentation that the Americans or Europeans knew. With no recognition and no documentation four decades of effort by an unsung band of dedicated artistes threatens to be buried forever in the sands of time.

But what is an arranger? He is someone who adapts a musical composition for voices, instruments, and performance styles working in close collaboration with the composer or

director. He determines the structure of the melodic line, enlarges the composition by creating harmonies, selects the instruments which would be deployed to play them, decides where they come in either as solos or as accompaniment or as fills between stanzas or as backdrop to the singer. He sets the rhythms and the instruments for the rhythms. As he does this, he is notating his thoughts into sheet music for each instrument or a section of instruments comprising two or more playing in unison e.g. violins .It's a painstaking developmental process with revisions and changes to suit the composer, the singer or musicians. The arranger of the old hindi film song is its unsung engineer.

Who were those engineers who conceived and painstakingly got together those craftsmen to perform ? They were the assistant directors read arrangers. Names like Anthony Gonsalves, John Gomes, Joe Gomes, Sebastian D'Souza, Manohari Singh, Kersi Lord, Chic Chocolate, Y S Mulky and several others.They were the arrangers and themselves super musicians. John and Joe excelled on clarinet, violin and alto sax. Manohari is a master of all these reed instruments and Chic Chocolate was known for his trumpet. Mulky is an accomplished pianist and accordion player. All were well schooled on musical theory, the tool for the construction of a piece.

A little known fact concerns Pyarelal of the famed Laxmikant Pyarelal duo. Pyare as he was affectionately known, was an accomplished violinist of the western classical school who was taught by Anthony Gonsalves mentioned above. He nursed ambitions to perform in the west like Zubin Mehta but was persuaded by Laxmi not to do so. Anthony was recognized by Pyare in the song by that name in "Amar Akbar Anthony".

Pyare was the arranger while Laxmi composed as they together put their stamp on over 300 films.

And who were the craftsmen ? Jazz music scrupulously documents all musicians in a record down to the recording engineer, the studio, the date of recording and equipment. The Indian film music world has been blissfully neglectful of all this. Consequently the craftsmen were uniformly unrecognised and unwritten about. All are today either old and neglected or dead. Sadly, in an era of a distribution explosion of this music across the internet and the media where the tunes they performed on reach millions across a new generation in mind boggling volumes.

Names like Anna Joshi (tabla) Amancio D'Silva, guitar, Francis Vaz, drums, Enoch Daniels, accordion, Kartik Kumar, sitar, George Fernandes trumpet, Mark Machado piano. the Monserrate brothers and many more performed and soloed on so many of the songs which continue to delight the senses.

The following is reported on Manohari Singh, belatedly recognized on his 75th birthday for his work across 4 decades by the Indian Express, Pune ...

".....An illustrious career spanning over four-and-a-half-decades, Singh still wishes real musicians behind film songs, be brought to the forefront. "These are people who sit in a

recording studio and play deserve as much credit as music directors and singers do,” says Singh who was very fond of his colleague and ace trumpeter George Fernandes. “He lent his talent to the famous song ‘Aane Wala Pal Jaane Wala Hai’ from Golmaal. But how many people know about Fernandes?” sadly questions Singh..”

But more on these engineers , the craftsmen and their experiences is the scope of articles to follow.

Ashwin can be contacted at ashwinpanemangalore@yahoo.com