

Capitalising on inheritance

The star of a recent performance by Sindhi troupe was Abida Parveen, but a more significant aspect was the exposure to young musicians from Sindh

Art News
2-3-03

By Sarwat Ali

music

A troupe of Sindhi musicians which performed in Lahore recently at the Alhambra represented almost all the musical forms practised in Sindh.

The most heartening aspect was the continuation of tradition of great musicians by their sons. Three young musicians in the troupe can be mentioned in particular: Owais Jumman is the son of Muhammed Jumman, Sarwar Ghafoor is the son of Fakir Ghafoor and Iqrar Waheed the son of Waheed Ali.

The elder musicians died in the course of the last decade or so leaving behind a legacy that is cherished. The continuation of the family tradition in music is reassuring. This question is assuming critical proportions as the sons of musicians are abandoning their family professions or are switching to forms which are popular and draw a bigger response. It is becoming increasingly difficult to hold back musicians to their genre and style, rather than opt for more popular forms which are financially rewarding many times over.

Waheed Ali was the son of Ghulam Rasool and a nephew of Ustad Umeed Ali Khan, and thus a brother of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan, Hameed Ali Khan and Rajab Ali.

This is as close as one can get to royalty in music. Muhammed Jumman was a great master of the Sindhi kaafi and totally dominated the genre in his

prime. Fakir Ghafoor was a singer more in the rustic folk tradition and represented the ethos of hinterland that was rough and uncut in opposition to sophistication of music connected with courts and cities.

These young musicians are in the process of capitalising on their inheritance, and with the effort and perseverance that goes with music it is expected that they will attain a level where they can be assessed as artists in their own right. The importance of being on the right path and the provision of conducive environment to them are factors which cannot be overemphasised.

The star of the show was Abida Parveen and that her appeal crosses boundaries and frontiers is a certain draw, but the more significant aspect of such visits is that one gets to hear many Sindhi musicians one is not usually exposed to in Lahore. The peculiarity of form distinguishes them as well as restricts their audience. Perhaps only the very initiated who are respectful of the long tradition are in a better position to appreciate the finer aspects of their singing.

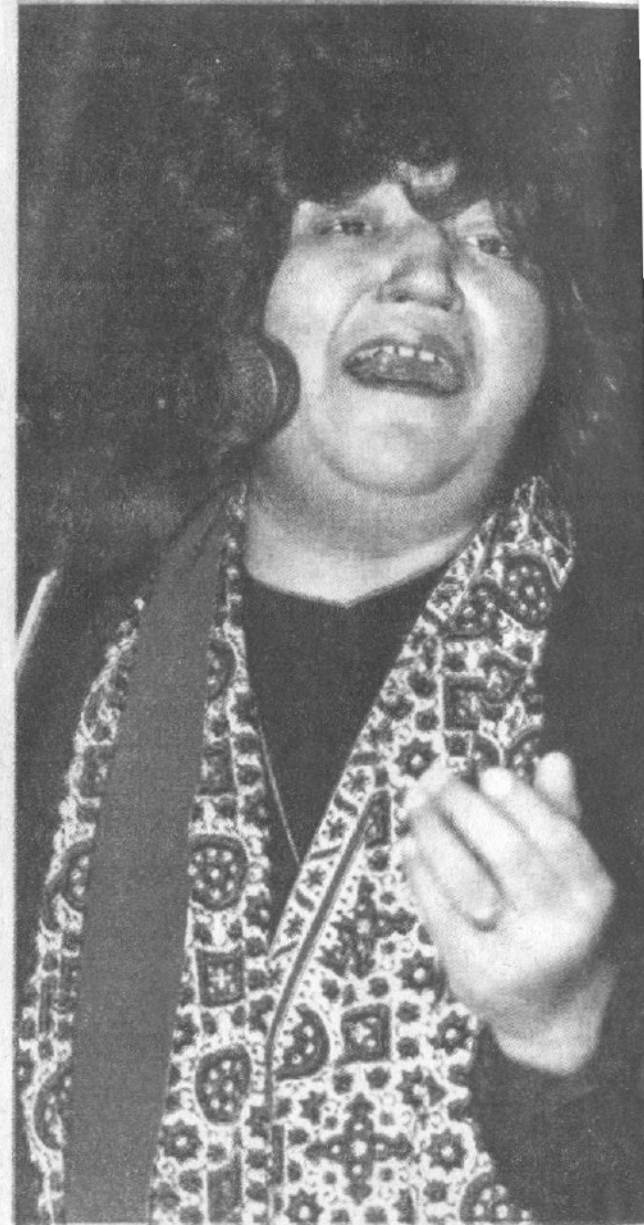
Some enthusiastic musicologists have traced the history of Sindhi music back to ancient times of gypsies and sought parallels with musical traditions of flamenco practiced in what is now Spain. Some see a definite synthesis in folk music with the coming of musicians who were practitioners of classical forms of music. Though it is difficult to put a date on this process, it started in the later years of the Mughal era as many singers

moved away from the centre of the Empire which could not hold to seek guarantees of their art and life in the emerging states. Khairpur was one such state that extended lavish patronage to the musicians.

The beginning of modern Sindhi music can be identified with the significant contribution of Shah Abdul Lateef Bhittai coming together with these classical genres. Most folk tales and romances sung in Sindh like Rano, Sassi Marvi and Sohni are in particular *raags* with their particular *ang*. Many of the modal patterns that have emerged subsequently were from the manner in which these romances were sung. To abstract tonal pattern from the story and drama was one of the achievements of that period of Sindhi music.

The modern day Sindhi music is the continuation of that process. The oral tradition of singing kalam of soofia was very vibrant in Sindh and the kalam of most Punjabi soofi poets was also sung there. It is very common to hear the Punjabi kaafis of Bulleh Shah, Khawaja Fareed and Sachal Sarmast in interior Sindh. The kalam of Shah Hussain was also retrieved from these bards who had sung him in Sindh for centuries before it was printed and published in Punjab in the 20th century.

This tradition has been nourished and preserved in Sindh in a more healthier form than it has been in Punjab, probably because in Punjab the musical system has laid itself open to outside influences which have created music as imitation or in



ritance

the manner of yoking together of disparate strands. The weaving of a well conceived pattern is yet to be achieved.

Abida Parveen is greatly influenced by the musical tradition which was followed by Ustad Manzoor Ali Khan. She appears to be most authentic when she sings the traditional Sindhi or Punjabi kaafi, though she has been singing ghazals and geets on popular demand for a wider audience. She has

The most heartening aspect was the continuation of tradition of great musicians by their sons.

been quite successful in gaining points on the popularity scale but in sheer musical terms she has made little contribution to ghazal or geet. Her forte remains her traditional numbers and crowds respond to that in a more discreet manner.

The others who performed were Zarina Baloch, Humaira Channa, Soong fakirs, who sang and danced on their *eiktaras* and Ustad Zafar Ali Khan. But one missed Allan Fakir, who is

trained as a singer of *wai* in the most pristine tradition. He popularised it in his later life for a wider audience. He was as great a performer as a singer and had the ability to create an instant rapport with the audience.

It was surprising that *alghoza* did not form part of the troupe. This instrument has become synonymous with Sindh and Khamiso Khan played it with such abandon that it becomes popular outside of Sindh as well. In this troupe there was no *alghoza* and even more intriguing since many play the *alghoza* with a fair degree of competence. Without it the musical repertoire from Sindh looks incomplete.

This is not the first time that a troupe from Sindh has performed in Lahore, but this one has certainly come after a few years' gap. The resumption was all the more welcome as one got to know of difficulties that were surmounted at the last minute for the show to take place in Lahore.

It was well worth the effort because these exchanges mean so much to the culture of this country. Of course, many Sindhi musicians have not only become nationally known but are recognised at the international level. They have not compromised the popular trends and have taken pride in the purity of their art that seldom get the opportunity to play outside of their particular circle. Such visits by musicians from other areas should be encouraged for appreciation by a wider audience and a greater exchange of musical ideas.