

Radio Music School

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THE 1960s were the golden era of music in Pakistan. Not only original tunes for film songs were composed but classical music also scaled new heights.

The products of the golden era in classical music, who became household names were the duos of Amanat Ali Khan-Fateh Ali Khan and Nazakat Ali Khan-Salamat Ali Khan, Raushan Ara Begum, Zahida Parveen and Ghulam Hasan Shaggan. The institution, which played a crucial role in promoting and popularizing classical music in the country, was Radio Pakistan. In addition to inviting the musical heavyweights to participate regularly in its programmes, its Lahore station also ran a weekly programme, *Radio Music School* under the able guidance and supervision of renowned classicist GA Farooq.

During the last four decades, however, music has degenerated from an art form to an industry. The impact of modern acoustics has changed its ambience, making it easy even for those who do not possess good vocals to record their songs camouflaged with the sparkling and pleasing sounds of modern electrophonic musical devices in which their vocals are drenched. The old institution of gharanas of professional musicians has become the major victim of the latest sound technology.

When radio made its debut in Lahore on December 16, 1938, music was already on the look out for new patronage. For more than 100 years before the emergence of radio professional gharana musicians had thrived on the munificence and personal patronage of nawabs, maharajas and the landed aristocracy. Some rulers of princely states and landlords kept musicians on their payroll as decoration pieces in their courts, but there were some others who patronized the artistes because they were genuine lovers of music. With the passage of time and after the British had taken root in the subcontinent, a new generation of princes and aristocrats had come up, which was not steeped in the tradition of promoting indige-

nous arts. They seemed to be more attracted by Western glamour.

The patronage of music thus lost was compensated to a considerable extent by the theatre towards the end of the 19th century and by radio in the 1930s, which provided job opportunities to senior and seasoned musicians. Stage music had a flavour of its own but it had its roots in the classical tradition. However, the unceremonious jettisoning of the theatre by the films, once again caused worries among the classicists. Bereft of patronage, they found it difficult to carry on with their musical pursuits with the same devotion and a sense of purpose. For some time in the beginning, both radio and films used their expertise to promote traditional music.

However, during the past 50 years, the popularity of classical music has suffered much due to a number of factors including the revolution in the field of communications and electronics. Gramophone discs, audiocassettes and now compact discs marginalized the maestros to the extent that educated aspirants began to rely more on these devices than on the expertise of music teachers. A majority among the up and coming singers claims to have learnt music, not directly from an ustad but with the help of recorded music of the old masters.

The reluctance of professional singers to pass on their knowledge and performing skill, especially the non-professional aspirants, also compelled the educated youth to seek alternatives to learning from professional gharana musicians. Today, one finds more *atayee* singers performing everywhere in Pakistan than the offspring of various gharanas of music. The Western cultural invasion of the Pakistani musical ethos has also much to do with the erosion of old traditions and the decline in the popularity of classical music.

In this space age, which is marked by speed and vigour, young aspirants of music have developed an aversion to their

traditional music. They are attracted more by the swinging beats of modern pop varieties and the use of modern devices for enlivening their presentations than the serene contemplative mode of an *alapa* (slow progressive delineation of a raga) or a khayal rendition. This trend among the younger generation of musicians has minimized the role of seasoned ustad.

However, art never dies. It goes into hibernation for some time but re-emerges later with greater vigour. As modern pop music seems to have reached the end of its tether, hopes for the resurgence of classical varieties has been revived. Hence, the need for the establishment of a school or academy for music.

Radio Pakistan, Lahore has, after a long time, reactivated its Radio Music School for teaching classical music to young aspirants through lectures and demonstrations.

Currently, its affairs are run by the Music Research Cell, which operates under the direct supervision of the deputy controller, Central Production Unit. The theoretical aspects of music are the responsibility of Ustad Ghulam Haider and training in practical music is imparted to the students in the studios by Ustad Badaruzzaman thrice a week. Both the learned teachers seem satisfied with the response the Radio advertisement received from educated young aspirants. When the teaching of music at the Radio Music School from the Lahore stations of Radio Pakistan becomes result-oriented and productive, and more students are enrolled, it will be well worth the effort to broadcast live its lessons and deliberations as was the case with the Radio Music School of the 1960s. The efforts of Radio Pakistan towards producing young classical vocalists will bear fruit and will also help in attracting the attention of many more young people from different parts of the country, prompting the management of other stations of Radio Pakistan to start similar classes. —
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