

Art

Orchestration in film music

Dawn 18

THE term orchestra is loosely applied to a group of instrumentalists playing a given piece of music in unison. But this is not the correct definition of an orchestra; it is not just an instrumental ensemble, but a great deal more. An orchestra, which is of Western origin, constitutes a band of instrumentalists playing instrumental or symphonic music under a conductor.

In Europe over 450 years ago during the time of Mozart and Haydn the essential features of an orchestra began to be standardized. Since then orchestra has made rapid strides and has considerably grown in size. Experiments in orchestration were first made by Bach and his contemporary, Handel; the former, in particular, who showed much insight in the choice of instruments, which varied from one composition to another. The full utilization of tone and timbre of the instrumental groups and a well-defined balance of forces in the orchestra came a little later.

Sarod maestro, Ustad Allauddin Khan, as the leader of the Maihar Band in Bengal, was the first musician who did some pioneering work in the field of orchestration. His work was augmented

further by the efforts of musicians of the calibre of RC Boral, Punkhaj Mullick and others. Their valuable contributions to popularizing orchestral music cannot be overlooked. The advent of sound motion pictures in the sub-continent gave a real boost to the use of the orchestra. To give orchestral support to film songs, foreign instruments, hitherto considered taboo, began to be used frequently.

A modern orchestra, both in Western and sub-continental contexts, consists of several families of instruments like string, woodwind and percussion, each one of which has a distinct tonal colour. It is the task of the conductor (in our case the composer) to assign different pieces from the compositions to different groups or a particular instrument of a group at suitable intervals. Indeed, the judicious selection of an instrument or a group of instruments for a particular piece of music is not an easy task, which only a seasoned conductor or composer can take up. In Pakistani orchestral music, which is used only in film songs, we find a far greater use of violins — perhaps, to lend a kind of melodic fullness to the piece.

The art of orchestration and arrange-

ment of instrumental melodic interludes was introduced in Indian films produced from Calcutta by Bengali composers by the mid-1930s. Earlier, clusters of musical instruments were used in theatres and in motion pictures to highlight the impact of certain scenes.

Lexicographically defined, an orchestra is a large group of players, who use string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments, designed especially for performing concert music (as in a symphony), or for accompanying an extended choral and orchestral composition which is more or less dramatic in character. From its Greek origin, when the word stood for the portion of the theatre between the auditorium and the stage, an orchestra has acquired a different connotation now.

Whereas an orchestra is an ineluctable component of a polyphonic system of music, it is of least use and importance for our homophonic classical music. Classical vocalists in the sub-continent have always made their presentations only to the accompaniment of a drone (taanpura), a string instrument (sarangi) and a percussion device (a couple of tablas). The requirements

of our art music do not need any more musical instruments. Even for a solo rendition of a raga by an instrumentalists, no device other than the one he is playing is used in the delineation and systematic progress of an asthai-antra of a raga in which it is composed.

Consequent upon the advent of the commercial theatre in the sub-continent, the "orchestra" was introduced for the first time. What it practically meant at the time was a small group of instrumentalists playing in unison a melody composed by musician to enhance the dramatic impact of several scenes in a stage play. The orchestra in those days comprised a couple of harmoniums (or a church organ), two or three clarinets, a couple of sarangis, a violin of two and a pair of tablas. The members of those so-called orchestras played a few melodic phrases committed to their memories. In other words, the musicians did not have the freedom to improvise during the course of their performances.

Radio and gramophone recording companies also used groups of instrument players for their songs, but the use of an orchestra in a strictly Western sense did not become the vogue until

the advent of the talkies. Music directors of films slowly but steadily began to assimilate the influences of Western orchestral music in the melodic interludes of their songs. In their film composition, especially during the early 1940s, the use of harmony and counterpoints began to slowly creep into the interludes of the songs recorded for the movies. The new trend caught the fancy of the younger generation of composer, who were impressed by jazz and Western polyphonic music. They started using elements of harmony and contrapuntal lines in the instrumental interludes of their compositions.

The discovery that two voices could sing two separate melodies at the same time (and still produce pleasing sounds) was made in Europe sometime in the 15th century. This new kind of music gradually replaced the older monophonic style. The earlier experiments in the new form were confined to organum — one group singing the melody and other singing at an interval of fourth or fifth below it. Next came descent, in which the two parts sometimes moved in opposite directions. For example, above the plain song of the

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tenor, a more elaborate accompanying part might be sung by children of different ages. This was called melisma — ornamental music intended for display. As the two parts became more independent of each other, often two distinct melodies proceeded at the same time. When a third and a fourth part were added, the music became truly polyphonic (multi-voiced). This trend is slowly making inroads in our music culture as is evident in pop music currently practised by the younger generation of Pakistani vocalists.

In Pakistan, two major systems of music are currently being practised. These are the classical and several popular varieties. This is an addition to the many varieties of folk melodies originating from different geographical regions. The popular varieties emanate mainly from films, radio and television. Currently under tremendous pressure, the classical varieties of our music have refused to be pushed into the shadows. However, our film music seems to have capitulated as a majority of songs has harmony as the basic ingredient on which the composers place the arrangement of instrumental interludes. — **SAEED MALIK**