

## Western influence on Indian music

The classical music of the West has influenced our musical culture, although it may not have done so in ways and on a scale easily comprehensible to us. The four broad areas in which the Western influence manifests itself are: (1) the two systems of classical music namely, Hindustani and Carnatic, (2) film and light music (sugam sangeet), (3) commercial TV advertising and (4) music education.

### In classical music

The influence of Western classical music on Hindustani music does not seem to extend significantly beyond the harmonium—an instrument of European origin. The harmonium, due to its inherent limitations (inability to play srutis or micro-tones and meend or glissando) has failed to earn the wholehearted acceptance of purists in the Indian classical music fraternity. (The 22-sruti harmonium developed by Dr. Vidyadhar Oak of Mumbai has removed this limitation to a considerable extent). Today the harmonium is easily the most popular accompanying instrument in India among singers of Hindustani classical as well as light music.

On the other hand, more Western instruments have been adapted in Carnatic music. The violin emerged long ago as the most preferred

## Manohar Parnerkar

instrument for accompaniment as well as for solo recitals. Baluswami Dikshitar (1786-1858), brother of Muthuswami Dikshitar, trained by a foreign tutor, was among the first Indian musicians to play the violin. Today, it is hard to imagine a Carnatic music recital without this instrument. Most significantly, for their style and technique, Lalgudi G. Jayaraman and L. Shankar—brilliant violin virtuosi from the south—received encomiums from one of the greatest violinists of the last century Yehudi Menuhin (Menuhin and Shankar cut an album together).

Coming to other important Western instruments, a few ingenious artists of our classical tradition like Hindustani musicians Brijbhushan Kabra and Vishwamohan Bhatt (guitar), and Carnatic musicians U. Shrinivas (C-mandolin) and Kadri Gopalnath (saxophone) have so cannily Indianised instruments of their adoption



Lalgudi G. Jayaraman

L. Shankar



Kadri Gopalnath

Brijbhushan Kabra



U. Shrinivas



AKIRATO



A.K.C. Natarajan



Prasanna



Anil Srinivasan



K. Sathyanarayana

that we may sometimes wonder about their true origin. The clarinet is one Western instrument which Mozart loved and for which he wrote one of his finest concertos. The instrument entered our music through the bands and later became popular in the folk theatre of the northern states and Bengal. The incongruity of the small town Indian clarinetist cheerfully entertaining the often rustic audiences of *nautanki* and *jatra* or his lording it over a rag-tag

wedding band in some small Indian town, is quite amusing. The clarinet was a part of the classical dance orchestra for Bharatanatyam several decades ago. It is the chosen instrument of veteran Carnatic musician A.K.C. Natarajan who was conferred the title of Sangita Kalanidhi by the Music Academy, Madras and was honoured by the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi for his contribution to Carnatic instrumental music as a clarinet artist. The guitar has been adapted to Carnatic music by Prasanna. The piano too has stepped in with Anil Srinivasan presenting collaborative concerts with Carnatic vocalists and instrumentalists. New York based, 29-year old Utsav Lal has earned international fame as a pianist who plays Hindustani classical music. The piano or for that matter any keyboard instrument, suffers from the same limitations that the harmonium does. By incorporating several nuances, keyboard artist K. Sathyanarayana has

made his instrument popular in Carnatic music.

### Films and sugam sangeet

The credit for introducing Western orchestration in Indian film music—song as well as background score—goes largely to the highly innovative duo of Timir Baran and Pankaj Mullick. The process inaugurated by these pioneers was enriched by stalwarts like Anil Biswas, Naushad, the duo of Shankar-Jaikishan, and Salil Chowdhury; later it was taken to newer heights by R.D. Burman, Ilayaraja (no mean composer of Western classical music) and A.R. Rahman. As a result, most film songs composed in the last eighty years or so have employed Western orchestration of some kind or the other as an embellishment tool and also to fortify them with harmony. Film music composers have resorted to this device to achieve texture with chordal arrangement and/or counterpoint.

Utsav Lal

