

R.D. Burman

Music so vigorous, colourful, flippant

by Shyam Hardikar



Not so many years ago, at a musical show in Bombay, just as everyone expected the short, rolypoly, bespectacled form of R. D. Burman, the star composer of the evening, to make a sedate entrance on stage, you suddenly heard the roar of a motor bike. Riding pillion to a seasoned traffic police officer, R. D. streaked across an aisle the whole length of the seated audience and was shot on to the stage.

That was some putting of show into business. Kishore Kumar makes his shows (when he gives them) lively by walking about on stage with mike in hand, but the young Burman had gone one better. He moved on horse-power.

Mercifully, no one was run over.

Much before, R. D. had given notice of youth taking over — certainly taking its place — on the film music scene. You began hearing new sounds in his songs. You heard it when he sang himself, once in a while. That call to the "Mehbooba" could have come from a hombre far away, urgent and not easily puttable-off.

Here was a new kind of a composer — good both jazzing it up and being classical.

On the following page, an article on R. D. the composer.

Photograph : Dhiraj Chawda

RAHUL DEV, a chip of the old block, has a unique style of composing as well as music direction. His songs do have a western personality but all the same their character is essentially and unmistakably Indian. He doesn't stifle melody, the quintessence of Indian music, while excelling in harmony. Having had his early grooming under none else than his father, the great Sachinda, he has a penchant for composing classical-based songs. For example, *Ghar aaja ghir sare* from "Chhote Nawab", *Raina beeti jaye*—"Amar Prem", *Mere naina sawan bhadon*—"Mehbooba", *Beete na bitai raina*—"Parichay", *Sharm aati hai magar*—"Padosan", *Aayo kahanse ghanashyam*—"Buddha Mil Gaya", *Meethe bol bole, Jane kya sochkar* and *Ab ke na sawan barse* from "Kinara".

Music is easier heard than composed, which is perhaps why R.D., true to his salt though, is often accused of plagiarism by people who perhaps do not seem to appreciate the difference between inspiration and imitation as also between blending and assembling. Moreover, should they take a closer look at film music of the late 40's, 50's and early 60's, or even at the film music that existed long before R.D. was born, they would discover that many of our old stalwarts have devoured, digested and doled out many a western tune, sometimes even in its original attire.

R.D. in fact has improvised western-oriented music, innovative that he is about harmony and rhythm patterns. So much so that every now and then he seems to beat the westerners at their own game. His compositions are characterised by flashes of intelligence if we just appreciate the sudden, rather subtle shift of scale in the main tune by the ingenious use of Spanish and bass guitars, intricately interwoven melodies of trumpet, trombone, saxophone, flutes and oboes along with a lavish array of violins, intensifying the total orchestral effect and all this marvellously synchronised with ever-varying rhythm patterns with drums, thumbas, duggis, tablas and various side rhythm percussions. To get an idea of this just listen to *Mein chali, mein chali; Kahana hein, kahana hein* ("Padosan"), *Aaja aaja mein hun pyar tera; O mere sona re; Dekhiya sahibon; Tumne muje dekha* ("Teesri Manzil"). *Leker hum diwana dil* ("Yaadon Ki Baa-raat"), *Ik din bik jayega* ("Dharam Karam"), *Piya too ab to aaja* ("Caravan"), *Kya hua tera*

wada ("Hum Kisise Kum Nahin"), *Tere bina jiya Jayena* ("Ghar"). However, if the song and situation demands, R.D., with his immaculate knowledge of the nuances of classical music can regale you with just a sitar, *tar shehnai* or *sarangi*, flute and tabla.

Naushad had once made this perceptive statement—"It is said Saikh Chowdhury doesn't adhere to the rules of music. However, in order to defy the rules, one must first have a thorough mastery over them. And according to me nobody knows the 'grammar' of music better than Salil Chowdhury." The same statement can be made about R.D. if it is recognised that the only rule of music is and should be appeal. And R.D.'s music has wide appeal, the bewitched ranging from 6 to 60. The 'headiness' in his tunes is very rich and has a potent effect. Indeed, the 'kick' is as exhilarating as that of a strong 'cocktail'.

As to many of his present songs which we don't like, is R.D. alone to blame? Don't forget that the quality of the lyric has much to do with the appeal of a song, notwithstanding the fact that it is the tune which brings out the meaning, mood and melody and makes a lyric more appealing and sometimes even immortal.

But gone are the days when lyricists like Shailendra, Shakeel, Hasrat, Sahir, Majrooh, Kaifi Azmi, Naksh Layalpuri, Kamar Jalalabadi, Rajindra Krishna, Raja Mehdi Ali Khan gave us countless beautiful lyrics, which were a challenge and also an inspiration to music directors. But down the years film making has degenerated into a mere business; creativity is on the wane and producers' box-office mania has paved the path for decadence.

Aesthetic exuberance and creative excellence are considerations expected to interest only reckless producers. Rape scenes, fights and murders, suspense

thrills and cabarets are the order of the day. Music of a film necessarily becomes subservient to the producers' purpose. Any surprise then that there is *Applied Lyricism*—instant, made-to-order lyrics (which may at best make a music director perspire instead of inspiring him). How on earth should a composer be inspired by *Baith ja baith gayee, Hum Tum ek kamre mein band ho, Jhooth bole karwa kate, Do bechare bina sahare, Mera padhene mein nahin laage dil, Rafta rafta dekho aankh mein ladi hein?* Laxmikant Pyarelal and Kalyanji-Anandji deserve credit, without reservation, for injecting melody into these lifeless and trite lyrics. The same is the case with R.D.

Gone are the days when an outraged Naushad could explode on the sets and tell a Mehboob "I know as much about music as you know about direction. I don't meddle in your work and you shouldn't meddle in my work. Please leave me alone." The producers generally try to get away with their lust for box office success by attributing it to 'public taste'. But if the popular return of "Albela" and several other old films is any indication of public taste, with particular reference to music, there is room to believe that it will not be long before 'Music' restores or regains its lost significance in a film. Good music sometimes on its own merits can see a film through at the box office.

You can share your sorrow with Madan Mohan and Roshan, your philosophy with Naushad and C. Ramachandra, your love-sickness with Shanker-Jaikishen and O. P. Nayyar, your loneliness with Chitragupta N. Dutta, S. N. Tripathi, Khayyam and Ravi, your yearnings and frustrations, your homesickness and sheer joy with Salil Chowdhury and S. D. Burman. But if you want to simply forget this mad, mad world and make merry then it has to be R. D. Burman.

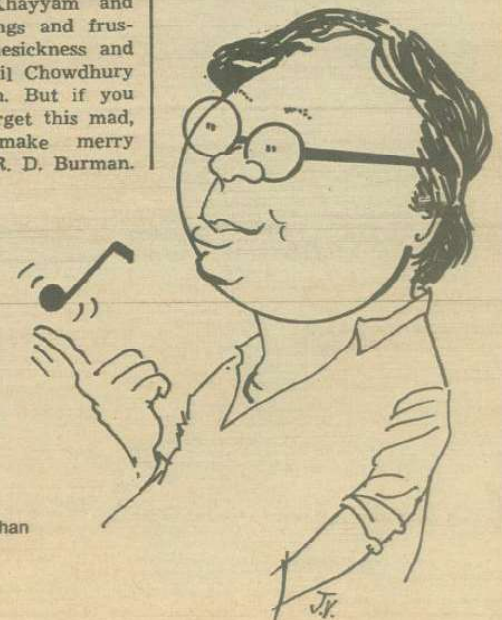
No wonder, as his music is so youthful, vigorous, colourful, breathtaking, hypnotising, bantering, flippant and ever-changing like the youth themselves.

Music is either good or bad. Good if it entertains you, bad if it fails to. But modern film music just doesn't stop at that—it tortures your ears. And R.D.'s music is no exception as in "Phandebaaz", "Kaala Sona", "Khalifa", "Khote Sickey", "Bandhe Haath", "Hifazat", "Garam Masala"... But he is in his element in "Aandhi", "Khushboo", "Parichay", "Aap Ki Kasam", "Mehbooba", "Amar Prem", "Kitaab", "Ghar", "Kinara" and "Gol Maal", both in song composition as well as background music. And as for the background score, to take just two instances, where a totally different type of background is required, R.D. has attained outstanding success in intensifying the situation with just a sitar, violin and a sarangi in "Kinara" and a guitar, mandolins and oboes in "Gol Maal".

The fact that 90% of his songs have been sung by Kishore on one hand and Asha and Lata on the other, doesn't do credit to him, however well they suit him. Should he really be innovative, as he is about rhythm patterns, what keeps him from experimenting with new voices?

However, music directors, if they really mean to, can save you from this torture by simply creating good melodies instead of good noise, think in terms of *Do ya teen* bass, in a year, and concentrate totally on them. The much maligned R.D. can then prove, given a free hand, *Hum Kisise Kum Nahin*.

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Cartoon by J. Vasanthan