

Bollywood Music Itching to go global



Hindi film music composer-cum-singer Himesh Reshammiya's recent performance at the Wembley Arena, London, was a huge success

With an increasing number of Indian filmmakers seeking international applause, the country's music industry is also adapting fast for global listeners. And if Hindi film music composer-cum-singer Himesh Reshammiya's performance to a sell-out crowd at the famous Wembley Arena in London, legendary singer Asha Bhosle's series of duets with Western singers as well as recently with Australian cricketer Brett Lee, and renowned composer A.R. Rahman's 'Bombay Dreams' world tour are an indicator, the world seems to be eagerly waiting for Indian tunes.

Much like Indian cinema, India's music industry was able to withstand the onslaught of Western music in spite of the economic liberalisation. While homogenised mass consumption is on an upswing there are plenty of Indian performers who are trying to build a bridge between tradition and modernity.

From classical strains in the heyday of the talkies, India's music industry now encompasses all song genres, feels senior journalist Chandan Mitra, an avid Bollywood watcher. Since the 1990s, popular music has gradually shifted out of the sole orbit of cinema and now revolves in several trajectories such as remixes, bhangra-pop, Indipop and also ghazals.

An array of talented composers like Rahman, Reshammiya, Nadeem-Shravan, Anu Malik, Anand-Milind, Anand Raaj Anand, Ismail Darbar and Shantanu Moitra have emerged to enthrall.

"Rahman and his compatriots have demonstrated that India is now ready to break the set moulds of popular music. They have also given us confidence in India's innate talent to produce cross-country melody: Music from the south is today as popular in the north as bhangra is in the discos of Bangalore. Popular music has welded India together," says Chandan.

Nasreen Munni Kabir, a London-based film-

maker and author, says that Bollywood is one up on Hollywood as "we know something the West doesn't. Song 'n dance can hold up a film."

Music and dance became part of Indian cinema at the same time as Hollywood musicals were at their prime worldwide. Nasreen says: "On the U.S. stage, however, song and dance routines — with the exception of opera — were confined to 'the musical'. This is still the case today: A film critics' Top Ten poll in 2002 by the U.K.'s 'Sight and Sound' magazine had only one musical, 'Singin' in the Rain' (1952)."

But in India, the use of film music has never been seen merely as popular and escapist, perhaps because its origins lie in classical, folk or urban theatre traditions. So, unlike a majority of their Western counterparts, Indian audiences can sit as comfortably through song-and-dance routines in films with a heavy political tone ("Bombay") as they can in comedies ("Munnabhai MBBS"), she adds.

But the global success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Bombay Dreams" (music by Rahman and choreography by Anthony Van Laast and Farah Khan) has shown that for a global audience musicals are a resilient genre that they can fall in love with all over again. And this is a big opportunity for India's music industry.

The winds of change sweeping across Bollywood have not left the music industry untouched. Old set ways of doing business are giving way to corporatisation. Filmmaker Yash Chopra led the way by parting ways with HMV-Saregama group and setting up his own music label called Yash Raj Music. Subhash Ghai's Mukta Arts too has launched a music label. Sahara One Pictures is also poised to launch a music business soon. So the music industry is emulating the West where successful artistes have established their own music labels.

Despite scepticism, Yash Raj Films, Mukta Arts and probably Sahara exude confidence that they'll flourish. More power to their elbow, we say. ■



A.R. Rahman's music score for Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Bombay Dreams' was immensely popular