

Music and Music Star: Promotion and Musical Values

Focus: Indian Classical Music

Professor Sanjoy Bandopadhyay

Department of Instrumental Music, Rabindra Bharati University

When I see around I see utter flow of talents in the music students. But despite this we do not see considerable addition in the number of star musicians. There seems to be huge amount of frustrations amongst the musicians and also some complaints from the serious listeners. The talented musicians frustrate because they do not see themselves placed at their expected level of mass acceptance. The general listeners are although happy with their favorite star musicians and their clones but some listeners complain that they are not getting new musical talents with fresh goodness. Sometimes I become doubtful. I wonder if these listeners at all want new goodness or they express such wishes to actually glorify their star musicians. I also doubt if most of us trust our own senses and judgments or most of us are driven by the 'special others'.

The following few paragraphs were written sometime back to match the topic of a conference session¹ on 'Music and Music Star', but I think these also somewhat address the raised points.

Music

In ancient India the definition of music comprised of vocal, instrumental and dance performed under a single item banner. Now vocal music and instrumental music are tagged with the term 'music' whereas the 'dance' is considered separate. As we see in India now, there are a substantial number of styles and sub-styles in music. These are generally categorized into three principle categories, namely Folk music, Classical Music and Popular Music. All the styles are undergoing considerable changes with the societal change and influences from other music styles. There is also evidence of strong intercultural elements in the music styles including influences of foreign music. In the context we must keep in mind that Indian Classical Music is instantly created music and the musician is the music composer doing instant music building (excepting a small part known as '*bandish*').

With the availability of good number of different music the audience receives wider variety of music tastes and warmly accepts some of them. Although it is common that musicians go through rigorous practicing but only few of them come out as star-musician. Star-musicians require accomplishing complex favorable mix of their acceptability of the music with successful market creation and sales.

The scenario of music promotion in India has also undergone considerable changes with the change of governing system in the country. Earlier days the patrons were the kings or the feudal lords but now the corporate groups promote music. There are also a large number of small to medium size music circles (especially for classical music) those organize small concerts throughout the year. But, we rarely find any music star performing in such circles, as the available money resource is usually quite low. There is no denying that these small music circles are doing a good job in the dissemination of music.

¹ XIIIth International Conference of German Musicological Society, Weimar, Germany, September 2004.

Music star

Music stars are the musical personalities those are widely acclaimed by the listening public.² The music lovers of the allied genres in which the musician may have worked in multicultural or intercultural musical activities may also know the star and love the music. The acclamation of a musician depends on the acceptability level of the musician's presentation by the audience. Acceptability depends on the general cerebral trend of the music listeners of a particular period of time. This cerebral trend is created out of many factors including the amount of exposure of the listeners to specific types of music those have attractive or compelling associations. Music changes with time and the musical components depend on the prevalent societal status. While amplifying on this I may point out when 50 years back 3 hour long rendering used to be considered creditable (even 20 years back) but now the present audience will look for shorter renderings. A long raga rendering may be now of one hour. They are now demanding compactness in presentation. The simple reason for this change is that life has become faster and the audiences are apparently losing their earlier composure to enjoy minor subtleties in music and asking for brighter and closely-knit music.

Music values

Values (excepting the natural values that is governed by the nature) are created through the necessities of the society as propagated by the people belong to the 'power layer'. 'Power' may be in terms of political and muscle power as in a king or successful politician of a state, or cerebral power as in an original preacher, or economic power as in a successful industrialist. This is true for all types of values whether it is social, moral or cultural. Necessities depend on the geographical positioning of any specific area in question and available natural resources. But the priority orders to cope with the problems are decided by the 'power layer'. The formation of musical values that involve wide mass also gets created under similar conditions.

Going further back, we can open a discussion on how these musical values get created. We all know that musical values are ever changing with the choice change. If we consider the situation about 75 years back we find that the feudal lords are promoting music. As these people had good understanding of music their picks were generally based on clear musical grounds. Now the situation has changed. Now the music promotion has gone into the hands of the corporate people. These people do not have much musical background but with the money power they have become important to the Indian music world. So, it is obvious that the selections of musician picking is dependent much less on the musical levels of the musicians but on the level of mutually established relationships. When the persons with shallow or no understanding of music becomes decision makers for marketing music then it is quite obvious that the quality of musician from the classical point of view may come on stake. So, many mediocre musicians are getting promoted and getting the market when many high level talents are getting unrecognized.

Now the question is which are the factors those work behind this process. Assessment of an art material is strongly dependent on the mental state and attitude of the art assessor or art appreciator. The general mental attitude towards art forms is dependent on general factors like:

- Popular art examples of recent past

² Some music connoisseurs differ to this definition and say that these musicians may be termed as 'crowd pullers' and by no mean 'Music Stars'. Music stars are those who really make outstanding music. While interviewing Mr. Rajiv Goenka, who was associated to RPG-HMV some years back, says if the music don't make one cry then how can one tell it as outstanding? (Interview Kolkata, May, 2004.)

- Any perceptible social change affecting the general mass and thus changing the behavior pattern of the public

What decides good music, the music itself or the listeners?

The music connoisseurs or the music listening public do not develop their own choice but pick up their best choice amongst the available music. Now, the music connoisseurs belonging to the 'power layer' decide the music and the musician that should receive wide exposure. They may be attributed as 'market makers'. The decision can be dependent on a number of factors like, the market maker's choice based on the personal mental frame developed out of exposure to earlier heard music or there may be other factors serving some non-related interests like personal relations. A common example for non-music related interests may be a number of star musicians, who is also a powerful promotional tool, choose to promote his or her own offspring or try to influence his or her connections for this purpose. A media tycoon despite possible ignorance in music, if impressed by someone's music or for any other reason, may make upside down or downside up for a musician and help to build up a musician and push towards stardom. The question is, what the musical values are doing in it? What we usually see in the area of Indian Classical Music that a person pushed this way usually does not sustain a long musical life because the mass audience's acceptability rests on the created musical values of the immediate past. After the 'market makers' create the market for a musician the 'market takers', those take the music to the market on the basis existing 'market values' and make business, promote these musicians and help them to sustain.³

Promotion and Music

Oxford Dictionary (Genie) writes meaning of 'promotion' as: 1. Activities done in order to increase sales of a product or service. 2. Activity that encourages people to believe in the value or importance of something, or that helps something to succeed.

Indian Classical Music listening public may be categorized as musically non-educated listeners, listeners with some exposure to musical training and musically educated listeners. The number of musically non-educated listeners is quite high. During the recent years the academically educated section of the society, that did not like to get associate them with music in the past, is taking strong interest in Indian Classical Music. A big section of this group has no or shallow knowledge of Indian Classical Music.⁴ As these people hold important positions in the society, either through their nature of job position or money power, their decision on Indian Classical Music considerably matter. This trend results in highlighting of the music those may not have nicely passed through the musical-values of the recent past.

Here is an effort to pen down the factors those are prominently responsible to generate mass appreciation:

- Developing Receptivity: Developed through exposure to music and effects of the waves of promotion.
- Acceptability: Develops in individual listeners' mind frame created from the exposure to music and effects of the waves of promotion.

³ Professor Sugata Marjit Interview/Kolkata/May, 2004

⁴ Comments of Mr. Amit Mukherjee Interview/SRA/May, 2004

- General Mind structure of the musically non-educated mass: Created through the intensity of promotion.
- Musical elements that create pronounced effects on current general listeners:
 - Musical techniques that create stunning effects, e.g. speed of execution, high intensity of sound, music contrasts created through the use of high and low intensities, use of very high pitch or very low pitch and so on.

Role of Impression Management in Indian Classical Music

Impression Management or Self-Presentation on stage plays an important role in image building of a musician. Traditionally, the puritans do not consider the focus on impression management with respect. Indian music traditions ethically want to solely rest on sincere maintenance of its traditions and focus on qualities in musical renderings. But, the successful musicians use impression management to gain mass popularity. As Indian Classical Music do not use much of visual effects and depend mostly to the aural components of music, the components for Impression Management restricts only on the graceful stage appearances and minor interactions with the audiences in terms of eye contacts and sometimes speaking a few sentences with the audience to give a feeling of closeness.

In the context it might be interesting to also look at the impressionism in Indian Classical Music. Philosophically, impressionism aimed to convey the emotional impact of an event, place, or thing, rather than an accurate portrayal of the subject itself. The uses of *sawal-jabab* (where the instrumentalist and the percussionist do some musical question-answers), going for high-speed crescendo or adapting other gimmicks are quite common. The immediate impact of all these gimmicks on the audience is that they get diverted from the musical nuances and get attracted to the musical trivia and this result to the acceptances of degenerated music. In today's Indian Classical Music trend the focus has shifted to attractive phrasing rather than the attractive 'raga phrasing'. The focus is now more on show off of technical acumen rather than getting immersed in the subtleties of raga delineations. The medium of expression is gradually getting more prominent than the actual expression! Musical presentations quite often portray the technical achievements of the musician rather than the music itself! Anybody can overhear the listeners' comments after the concert 'Oh! How fast and clear he was on the tans!' or 'See the *meends*—those were really fast and complicated' but rarely 'How beautiful was the *raga* elaboration!'

Finally:

During the discussion we have seen how 'promotion' has a pronounced role in making a music star. But, a successful performance must satisfy the established musical values. The musical values are changing and the success of a musical performance depends on the established values of the recent past. The musical values of the recent past get created by the master-musicians and may also by the musician on stage through his/her earlier performances.

Acknowledgement:

The relevant parts of interviews with following musicians and musicologists were used : Buddhadev Dasgupta, eminent musician (Indian Classical Music); Rajiv Goenka, formerly related to RPG-HMV recording company and music connoisseur (Indian Classical Music); Professor Sugata Marjit, eminent economist and musician (Indian

Classical Music); Amit Mukherjee, Executive Director, Sangeet Research Academy (Kolkata, India) and musician (Indian Classical Music); Kumar Prasad Mukherjee, musician and musicologist and Dr Rajeeb Chakraborty (involved in Indian Popular Music productions and musician (Indian Classical Music).