Hitting the Right Notes

Audio tape producers are riding the crest of the Indian film industry’s music boom and composers are becoming stars in their own right.

By ANUPAMA CHANDRA with RAVIKA SHETTY

There is a new hero in the Indian film industry: music. Composers and music producers are singing all the way to the bank with country-wide street sales in audio cassettes touching about Rs 500 crore annually. In the music industry today, the stakes are high, the players are many and there is a huge amount of money to be made. Approximately 150 Hindi music titles are released every year, with all-India sales estimated at 30 lakh cassettes a day—inclusive of piracy. In the eastern region alone Chalke Peeche sold over seven lakh cassettes.

Three years ago there were only five companies primarily involved in film music. Today, there are over 10 players in the field. Once monopolised by TMV (turnover Rs 53.34 crore), the profit potential has seen a host of new entrants into the industry including Lara, Red Cat, Crescendo and Time Audio as well as more established ones such as Tips, Venus, T-series and Westside Audio.

The figures tell the story. Market estimates say that Tips invested approximately Rs 1.25 crore, including publicity, in the Khiladiya soundtrack, and sold over 50 lakh tapes, making the company a profit of Rs 3 crore. Aashiqui sold around one crore tapes, making a Rs 1-crore profit for T-series. Venus was established mainly due to the sales of the music of Saajan, their profit being Rs 2 crore.

One result of the increased earnings for music companies is that they are also passing on to producers. In the '90s the producers were giving music rights to TMV and that too only on royalty. When Polydor, which later became Music India, came in, the going rate was Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000. In walked Gulshan Kumar of T-series in 1985 and everything changed. Kumar had offered Rs 5 lakh for the music of Mard, Today, apparently, Prema Granth, being made under the R.K. banner, has been bought by TMV for an estimated Rs 70 lakh. Bawarchi has been bought for Rs 1 crore. Feroz Khan has sold the audio, overseas video and theatrical rights of his forthcoming Agneepath to Venus for Rs 2.4 crore.

The music boom has also sent prices spiralling upwards in the south. The audio rights for Major Chandrakant starring N.T. Rama Rao and Mohan Babu were sold for Rs 21 lakh. Chiranjeevi's new film, Mechanie Allada apparently fetched Rs 30 lakh for the producers. Says Appa Rao, head of LEO, floated in 1986 to cater exclusively to the needs of the Telugu film industry: "A-grade producers, be it in Hindi or Telugu films, are demanding more money for outright audio rights."

Some companies even buy audio rights before a single track has been recorded. Music broker Kumar Mangad, for instance, has just brokered two Rs 45-lakh plus deals for films which won't be released till next year. "We are signing movies the day they are announced," says TMV's V.K. Dubey.

With the music industry proving to be such a money-spinner, the leading musical stars are busy. Nadeem-Shravan, despite "cutting down drastically", have 24 films

Nadeem-Shravan: on the fast track to cash
on hand, and have signed 40 more. Composers Anand-Milind, who were once working on 100 films simultaneously, now at any given time have 20 completed projects, 20 projects already signed, and are in the middle of composing for 40 films. They record an average of 15 songs a month. Lyricist Sameer, who writes almost all the songs that Nadeem-Shravan and Anand-Milind compose, is currently working on a hundred films. And composers Laxmikant-Pyarelal have 35 films on hand.

Small wonder then that the busier composers have music stocks. Anand-Milind keep about 100 mukhadas (choruses) in stock. There are six to seven song situations in Hindi movies. When a producer narrates a subject to us, we give him a minimum of two mukhadas per situation. Usually they take five from the stock and we write one or two for a specific situation.” Nadeem says: “We have the largest stock of music in the industry. We have over 10,000 tunes.”

Given the current situation, this makes perfect sense. “Ninety-nine point nine per cent of today’s songs are happy love duets.” says Laxmikant. Former film editor Raju Naik, who has 200 tapes with stock music and has done background music for about 500 films, says the practice really took off in the early 70s when a strike by musicians forced directors to go in for stock. Movies like Chhor Machaye Shor were hits and using stock music became a norm. Producers prefer this because comparatively it’s cheaper. This costs Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 as against Rs 4 lakhs to Rs 5 lakhs for an original soundtrack.

Besides technology, what has further changed the colour of the industry is the massive promotion campaigns mounted by the music companies. Radio, print and television publicity begins when a film’s music is released, usually at least three months prior to the movie’s release. “Promotion costs are sometimes Rs 20 lakhs to Rs 30 lakhs a movie,” says Dubey.

Satellite especially has become a prime medium of publicity. Zee TV has two new music-based programmes, Game Anjane and Philips Top 10, as well as two trailer shows, Ek Nazar and Jhalak, while the Metro Channel, of course, has the blockbuster Superhit Mugabba. The producer and music company holding a film’s audio rights pay Zee to air the songs and trailer. Game Anjane costs Rs 7,500 per song, Ek Nazar and Jhalak cost Rs 15,000 per trailer each time. Philips Top 10 has worked out an agreement with the Indian Music Companies Association that Zee is unwilling to disclose; and Superhit Mugabba has an agreement with the Film Makers Association with each song costing Rs 15,000 each time.

Radio spending has also increased. Bihari Mittle of D.S. Mittle & Sons, an advertising agency which compiles Chitrakoth, a highly-rated programme of new film songs, says radio campaigns of A-class films can average Rs 15 lakhs. Maine Pyar Kiya had Rs 10 lakhs of radio publicity. Anari had a Rs 7-lakh publicity campaign, and Khoon Mera’s publicity is touching Rs 8 lakhs. A decade ago producers spent only Rs 2.5 lakhs to Rs 3 lakhs on radio publicity.

Music companies are also coming up with other methods to boost their sales. Venus puts spots for forthcoming releases on released audio tapes. So does Tips. For Venus’ Baazigar, distributor Shringar Films placed a TV set outside Bombay’s Dreamland cinema, continuously playing three trailers of the film. “Earlier you could only see trailers inside the hall, here people on the street can see it. It’s worked out very well,” says Shravan Shroff of Shringar.

Perhaps the slickest and most innovative marketing strategy belongs to Ghanshyam Henday of Pyramid Audio in Madras. Convinced that consumer products should be marketed with a Unique Selling Strategy (USS), Henday decided to push the tape of Gentleman, the Tamil industry’s latest talking point. They set targets for dealers and those who met them were given free tickets to Singapore; newspapers were swamped with advertisements; and free tapes were distributed to tea shops and at marriage halls.
The result: at the first show of the movie, the audience were humming the tunes as if they’d heard them for ages, and Gentleman, became the highest selling tape in recent times, with a sale of three lakh copies.

But for one is extremely confident of the future. “Music is a very inexpensive form of entertainment,” says Dubey, “and the market is expanding every year.” It will increase its manufacturing capacity this January, from 2.5 million cassettes a month to 4 million.

Today composers are stars in their own right. Nadeem-Shravan have their faces plastered all over the place. Illayaraja was the first music director in Tamil music history to have his face splashed on film posters and hoardings. In addition they are making considerable money, with top music composers said to be taking between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 15 lakh per film and top lyricists.

MUSICIANS

The Music Makers

NADEEM-SHRAVAN: Strugglers for almost 12 years before Aashiqui, the duo are now composer-supersstars. They claim to have generated Rs 150 crore worth of sales. After Aashiqui, they’ve had superhits in Phool aur Kaante, Deewana, Sadak, and Sajan. This year, their success stories have been Rang and Han Hain Raahi Pyar Ke. But since neither sales match the earlier ones they are planning to release NS, designer music, under their own label, and since everyone is copying them, to change their film music style. “The orchestra and outlook will change,” says Nadeem. They have been accused of lifting Pakistani tunes but they deny it. Chumma and now Choli ke peechhe. Their first film was Parasmani in 1961. “We’ve survived this long because we have always worked according to the director,” says Laxmikant. “Also, every four years, music changes and we’ve changed ourselves with it.” LP, who work mostly with lyricist Anand Bakshi, say they have refused to do any more choli songs. “One choli is enough for 70 years.”

ANU MALIK: With Baazigar, Sir and Phir Teri

ANAND-MILIND: They were no strangers to success before hitting the jackpot with Qayamat se Qayamat tak in 1998. They’ve had major hits with Dil, Beta, Bol Radha Bol and this year’s Anaaari. They have been accused of, and have admitted to, lifting Illayaraja’s tunes. Dhak Dhak was a carbon copy. “That was due to pressure,” says Milind. “We are big fans of Illayaraja and have been inspired but we will never take the entire tune.” Their latest contribution to Hindi film music is the one word-based song: Tu Tu Tu Tara, Tuna Tuna, Tak Tak Tumma. Dhak Dhak, and now Aat E.O.O.O. in David Dhawan’s Raja Babu.

LAXMIKANT-PYARELAL:

Thirty-two years in the business and they are still going strong. Among their hits: Ek Do Teen, then Jumma

Kahani Yaad Aayee. Malik is undoubtedly the composer of the year. After two hits like Jalal and Sohni Maliwal, it was downhill for him with Mard, Toofan and Ganga. Jamuna Saraswati. Three years ago, he hit the comeback trail, encouraged mostly by Mahesh Bhatt. He has recently signed five big films including Feroz Khan’s Aagnikund and the ones being made by Shekhar Kapur and Manooor Khan. Says he: “I’m a natural, tunes just come to me.”

ALKA YAGNIK: Trained under Kalyanji-Anandji, she first sang for Rajesh Roshan in Hamari Bahu Alka. She also did the More Aaenge Mein number in Laawaris but things really took off after the Ek Do Teen number in Tere Mere. Since then, she’s hit the jackpot with movies such as Saajan, Phool aur Kaante, Deewana and now the biggest chart-buster of all times, Choli ke peechhe.
between Rs 15,000 and Rs 20,000 per song.

There remains, of course, an inherent danger, for this is a risky business where everyone will not hit the jackpot. Yet, even though out of the 150 Hindi titles released every year, a mere 5-10 are hits and only 15-20 recover, few are terrified by the odds because if a film is a hit, then the sky is the limit. Mera Pyar Kiya's music, for instance, has sold over one and a half million tapes so far. Ashav's Dubeys says: "One super-

hit film can compensate for 10 flops."

And so they keep marching on, to the studio, and of course, to the bank. Who cares if the songs are similar, the music aimless, the lyrics tasteless. After all, there are a million plus people who are willing to buy anything they offer. These music tracks know only too well that if their music is top of the charts, so are they.

—With M.A. MAHANAND and bureau report

A&R MANAGERS

The Music Tasters

TWO months ago Zahir Ahmed, manager, Artiste and Repertoire (A&R), of Weston Components Limited was given a simple brief. He was asked to prepare about half a dozen albums of Rajasthani folk music. For the next few weeks Ahmed—who worked with sony for 27 years before he joined the Rs 16-crore music company in 1987— toured towns and villages of the state, meeting and auditioning folk singers. By the time he finished his trip, he had selected about a dozen singers and knew how to categorize the music. He then recorded 60 folk songs in Jaipur, which will be released as five separate albums in December.

It's not Weston alone just about every music company in the country has an A&R manager. An A&R manager is to the music industry what a wine taster is to the wine business. His job: to identify the latest trends in music, select vocalists and musicians and finally package them into a saleable commodity. In a competitive world where the music stakes are worth crores of rupees, the selection of the right kind of music is directly linked to the bottomline. As a result, the A&R work-done informally until a few years ago—has become crucial to a company.

The manager for Promotion and Artiste Management of Crescendo Music and Marketing, Greg Dias, who recently released an album by the Bangalore-based band Pulse, says: "Nowadays concepts sell, not music alone." Dias should know. His ability to identify popular trends was developed in the years when he worked with CBS and Magnusound before joining Crescendo.

To create and sell concepts, it becomes essential to know your notes. There are those like Weston’s Ahmed who has been trained as a

vocalist in the Rampur Gharana style of classical Indian music. But according to Deepak Shourie, general manager, Music Today, an academic understanding of music is not essential. "A music taster combines an ear for the music with a feel for the market," he says. Music Today is a good example of concept selling. Its entire range of classical music is thematically categorised

album of Hindi-funky street music, as well as Sanjay Raina of Punjabi rap.

New trends in the music industry have altered the job profile of the A&R manager. Most music companies now co-produce Hindi movies and own the music rights. To make the most of their investments—which is at least Rs 1 crore per movie—the companies use the movie tracks for other purposes. Weston Components, for example, has recorded religious songs on the track of some of its movies like Jaan Tere Naam. Here, the A&R manager’s job is to find a lyric writer and fit the new words

over the existing tune.

The video age has brought in another job. The music taster today not only has to find the right vocal chord, but has to ensure that they are presented to the public in an attractive package. Magnusound’s Dias, for instance, expects newcomers to sing and act before a camera. Good playback singing alone is not enough. Singers are also required to do live performances. For the music tasters no effort is enough to hit the right notes which will make the cash registers ring.

—PRANJAL SHARMA and ARUNKATIYAR