

## THE SOUL OF MUSIC (HARMONIUM)

Lalit Kumar\*

Dr. Yadvindra Sharma\*\*

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The harmonium has long been a favourite with musicians, including the wandering minstrels who sling it on their backs. For the learning the fundamentals of music, the harmonium is absolutely essential and, in fact, it is part of many households in India. It is required in temples and gurdwaras as an accompaniment for singing *bhajans and Kirtans*. It is essential for tamasha and folk music and also for touring musical troupes in rural areas. No music director can compose without the ubiquitous harmonium. The harmonium also forms an integral part of the *qawwali* repertoire, as many *qawwals* use the instrument while performing.

The harmonium was introduced to India by missionaries in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. And though the design remains, it boasts of some Indian innovations like “drone stops” and a scale – changing mechanism. It might surprise the music lovers to know that the harmonium was invented by Parisian Alexandre Debain in 1842. May be because of its French origin, that the India government still considers the harmonium a foreign instrument. Though it is made in India now.

But musically speaking, the harmonium is essentially an alien instrument to the Indian tradition, as it cannot mimic the voice, which is considered the basis of all Indian music. *Mend* (glissando), an integral part of any classical recitation, is not possible on the harmonium, and as such, one cannot faithfully reproduce the subtle nuances of a raga on this instrument. The harmonium is thus despised by many connoisseurs of Indian music.

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\*Research Scholar, Singhanian University, Singhanian, Pachari Bari, Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan)

\*\*Supervisor, Singhanian University, Singhanian

Purists in India music opine that the harmonium, the piano and the electronic keyboard, with 12 Keys to an octave, cannot capture any of the microtones that Indian music is famous for , and it would be necessary to design a harmonium with 22 Keys in an octave so that it can it can handle ann the nuances of Indian music.

Samvadini, a modified of version harmonium, is often used by Indian harmonium maestros to perform solo on the instrument.

But in the carnatic music, the classical music of south India, harmonium's use is very much limited. Music maestros like Devdu Iyer and Madurai M.R. vasavambal helped to establish a place for the harmonium in carnatic music, but their careers were restricted to the drama stages. As per septuagenarian Carnatic musician Palladam Venkataramana Rao: "People do not take up the harmonium because it is not possible to produce the gamaka (subtle variations in the pitch of notes) on it. But gamaka alone does not constitute Carnatic music," Says Rao, who is perhaps the only artistes who gives solo harmonium Carnatic music concerts. All India Radio banned the use of harmonium by classic artists from 1940 to 1971 for the same reasons."The Ban on solo performance was lifted only recently," says V Ramnarayan, editor of the Sruti magazine, a journal devoted to Indian music. The violen slowly slipped into the place that the harmonium had vacated as an accompaniment in concerts. Musicians also found that the harmonium could not.

But harmonium proved to be great success with eminent Hindustani musicians like Gyan Prakash Ghosh, Appa Jalgaonkar, Ustad Zamir Ahmed Khan, Ustad Nazar Hussian, Ustad Bhure Khan, Neeraj Gandhi, and Sudhir Sharma and in carnatic music, Perur Subrahmania Dikshitar and Alathar Venkatesa Iyer were outstanding harmonium *vidwans*, who played nothing but carnatic music on the keyboard instrument.

The invention of electronic organ in mid 1930s spelt the end of harmonium's success (although its popularity as a household instrument declined in the 1940s as musical tastes changed).

Teakwood is mainly used for making harmoniums. "We make Vs with single, double, triple reeds where the same key would produce different tones. We specialise in instruments with four set of reeds, "says Elangovan of Madras Musical Emporium in Chennai.. Various persons are involved in woodwork and assembling the instrument in the shop .Unlike instruments like veena and guitar, where the tuning is done by users; harmoniums have to be tuned as they are being made. "Business has become dull over the years as many people prefer keyboard over harmoniums" says Elangovan. Benares, Pune and Kolkata and other important harmonium-making centres.

**REFERENCES**

1. Paul Hindemith. *Hin und zurück (There and Back)*, an operatic sketch that uses a harmonium for its stage music.
2. Sigfrid Karg-Elert. Various works for solo harmonium.
3. Kronos Quartet. *Early Music*, an album that has several pieces featuring harmonium.
4. Henri Letocart (1866–1945). 25 Pièces pour harmonium, Premier cahier.
5. Franz Liszt. *Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia, Movement II: Purgatorio*
6. Gustav Mahler. *Symphony No. 8*
7. George Frederick McKay. *Sonata for Clarinet and Harmonium (1929)* (also adaptable to piano or violin)
8. Martijn Padding. *First Harmonium Concerto (2008)* for harmonium and ensemble
9. Gioachino Rossini. *Petite Messe Solennelle* is scored for piano and harmonium.
10. Arnold Schoenberg. *Herzgewächse*, Op. 20, for high soprano, celesta, harp and harmonium.
11. Franz Schreker. *Chamber Symphony*
12. Richard Strauss. *Ariadne auf Naxos* an opera (libretto by Hugo von Hoffmansthal) that employs a harmonium in the orchestration of each of its versions. It requires an instrument with many stops, which are specified in the score.
13. Louis Vierne. 24 Pièces en style libre pour organ ou harmonium, Op. 31 (1913)