

A Study of Western Musical Techniques Used in Sinhala Light Songs During the 20th Century

M. Alawathukotuwa

Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya

Introduction

Music can be classified as Eastern and Western. While there are similarities between them, the two systems employ certain techniques peculiar to each one. These techniques are used not only in classical music but also in applied music such as film and drama scores and light songs. It is evident that western techniques are employed now a days in creative music whatever the fundamental music system. However, only the simplest forms appear to be used. The aim of the present research is to study from a musicological point of view the employment of musical techniques in light songs composed in Sri Lanka. These include counterpoints, harmony, local and instrumental techniques. It is also possible to observe the use of techniques employed in folk music of the west such as *Yodelling* and fiddle-playing.

Methodology

The research methodology followed in the study is a survey of relevant musical compositions. Library research includes book collections and archives of recordings such as those at the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation. Information was sought through interviews with artistes, composers and producers who were influenced by western music. In this research I faced some difficulties in finding certain types of applied music such as recordings of music for drama, films and tele-dramas.

Discussion

The use of western music techniques has introduced a variety of forms in Sinhala light songs. The traditional *Stay* and *Antara* structures have been expanded through external elements such as introduction, interlude and coda. These elements are first evident in the songs of the gramophone era but became more complex in film songs. From the 1960s so-called "group songs" employed close harmony and Spanish Guitar type accompaniments. Since the use of vocal harmony was the main feature, these groups came to be known as harmony groups.

Each use of western techniques was confined to these single forms (eg. The use of the primary chords). However with time, more complex chord changes were introduced and western techniques came to be employed to highlight the meaning or emotion of the songs and lyrics. Examples include the song *Sandakada pahanaka* from the film *Matara Achchi* sung by Sunil Edirisingha, and music composed by Victor Ratnayaka and the song named *Sulan koda wehi* sung by Neela Wicramasingha and composed by Sena Weerasekara . Both these examples use counterpoint to illustrate the meaning of the lyric.

Modulation which is an important feature of western music is also employed occasionally. Eg. *Viyoo Gee Geyena hade* sung by Neela Wicramasingha with music by Nimal Mendis, and the song *Nimterak nodutu* sung by Sunil Edirisingha with music by Rohana Weerasingha . Following the practice of some western songs these have their last chorus sung in a higher key (compare the song from the late 50s *We were two innocent hearts* sung by Tony Brent).

Vocal music plays an important part in the western system, and the voices are systematically classified and blended; but the use of multiple layers of voice in Sri Lankan music seems to be somewhat limited. Mr. Premasiri Kemadasa's songs often employed vocal arrangements suggestive of western music. Eg- song *Kanyawi* sung by Amarasiri Pieris and the Song *Udumbara Hinehenawa*.

Although local singers can be found whose voices fall within the ranges of western voice classification such voices are not employed methodically in Sri Lanka.

In addition to the standard techniques of western music, Sri Lankan songs also employ techniques found in western folk music such as yodeling.

The influence of western techniques is stronger in instrumental music. Eg- the positions, systems of tuning and playing techniques for

the Violin such as *Pizzicato* and *Vibrato* are used in Sri Lankan songs.

depth and ornamentation to the form of the songs.

Results

Whatever the melodic basis of the song, western techniques figure prominently. These are introduced with the objective of giving