

## THE COMPOSITIONS OF PREMASIRI KEMADASA: CAN THEY BE CALLED SYMPHONIES?

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### Introduction

Premasiri Kemadasa, the well known musician who composed music for light songs, and scores for films and dramas (stage and teledramas), has also composed some larger scale compositions. These includes *Sinhala Awuruddha*(1966), *Mage Kalaye Mauni* ( 1978), *Maha Muhuda* (1967 ), and *Niyagaya ha Wessa*(1975 ). Various writers, including Kemadasa himself, have described these as Symphonies. The purpose of this paper is to examine the appropriateness of the term symphony, to describe these compositions of Kemadasa.

### Sources

The most important sources are the compositions themselves. In addition various books and articles on the subject have been consulted.

### Methodology

The research methodology followed in the study is the survey of relevant musical compositions. Library research included book collections and archives of recordings such as those at Sri Lanka Broadcasting Cooperation. In this research I faced some difficulties in finding the recordings of certain compositions of Premasiri Kemadasa such as *Niyagaya ha wessa* (1975).

### Discussion

Although many writers have mentioned that the above compositions of Premasiri Kemadasa are symphonies, it is clear that when compared with western symphonies they lack the formal characteristics which would justify this description. In Western music, the symphony is an extended composition for orchestra. Normally it has three or four movements. Usually, the first movement of a symphony is fairly fast and weighty in content and feeling. The vast majority of first movements are in sonata form. The second movement is slow. And the last movement will be fast. This is often proceeded third movement such as minuet or scherzo. The final movement is simple in character.

When comparing Kemadasa's compositions with Western symphonies, it will be clearly seen that the original structure of the western symphony has not been followed. He has tried to tell a story or express an idea by using music in his compositions.

eg:- *Sinhala Awruddha* composition is based on the New year festival. He attempts to depict significant stages from beginning to end of the New Year ceremony.

*Mother of my time* is based on the memory of his mother.

*Maha muhuda* is a musical description of the sea.

In all of these compositions he uses standard Western orchestral instruments as well as oriental instruments such as the tabla, the sitar and Sri Lankan drums. Sometimes some instruments are played in non traditional ways to create sound effects.

eg:- In *Sinhala Awruddha* - Musical instruments are used to imitate sounds such as birds , fire crackers....., etc.

However Western music includes a kind of orchestral composition which is more free in character when compared with the symphony. This is the symphonic poem or tone poem. This belongs to what is known as programme music. That is, it narrates a story or depicts an idea:

eg:- The Vltava tone poem is a musical composition of Freerick Smetana (1824- 1884) which describes the Vltava river in Bohemia.

### Conclusion

It would be better to describe the Kemadasa's orchestral works as symphonic poems or tone poems rather than proper symphonies.