



RR Dhoot and Sons make Sarvashanti agarbatti with herbs required for the Navagraha shanti pooja and other agarbattis such as Karyasiddhi, Musk Ambar, Padmanabha, Kasturi Chandan and Shantiketan



ORCHESTRAS CHANT AN SOS CALL

From above: Members of the orchestra Hit Mix, which has held 1,700 shows so far; Pramod Kumar Saraf (right) and members of Melody Makers perform with Kishore Kumar; members of the orchestra, Nishad

In this age of fast food and fast money, the charm of the musical orchestra, which once regaled us on many occasions, is gradually dying and disappearing. Prominent orchestra groups from the city, which have performed on innumerable occasions, entertaining their audiences with rocking numbers of the day or hits from the past are now worried about the changing times.

Orchestra Hit Mix, a 17-year-old group in the city has held 1,700 shows so far, sharing the stage with stalwarts such as Suresh Wadkar, Anuradha Paudwal and SP Balasubramaniam among others. Today, the group is struggling to keep pace with the changing culture. Shrikrishna Dhole, a member of the group, says, "People today like the remix version of a song. Old songs were based on melody whereas in today's era, songs are more rhythm based. Songs like *Sheila Ki Jawani*, *Munni Badnam Hui* and *Character Dheela Hai* gain quick popularity but are soon forgotten. Hits of the yesteryears remain forever. There is a select class of people who still like to listen to an orchestra." People today prefer a DJ over an orchestra, he says, because of the popular trend of fast and peppy numbers in contrast to orchestras that usually play old songs which are slow and devoid of any energetic beats.

Another city-based orchestra, Melody Makers, was launched in 1961 to collect funds for the Panshet flood victims. This group, which recently celebrated its golden jubilee, includes artistes Suhaschandra Kulkarni, Surendra Akolkar, Pramod Kumar Saraf and Ashok Kumar Saraf, who are also the founder members. Melody Makers has performed at



various prestigious international venues such as the Times Square in New York and the Albert Hall in London. They accompanied many superstars of their times such as Kishore Kumar, Ashok Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Shammi Kapoor, Dharmendra and Hema Malini. Says Ashok, "With so many TV channels, people don't like to go out these days. Also there are many musical shows like *Indian Idol*, and *X Factor*, which keep the audiences glued. Everything is available at their doorstep and this has adversely hit live performances."

At the peak of their career, Melody Makers would charge Rs15,000 to 20,000 for a show. "If it was an open air auditorium and larger audience, the pricing was different. Today, with changing times, we charge Rs30,000 for general wedding or corporate events depending on the location and travel expenses. If it is a special star night, then the cost may go up to Rs50,000 or more," adds Ashok.

He feels that the multiplex and mall culture is another reason for the

death of live music. "Earlier, during a weekend, people used to go for orchestras or plays, but today a family prefers to go to a multiplex, watch a movie, eat good food and spend time together. The golden hits by legends like RD Burman, Kishore Kumar and Shankar Jaikishan have been replaced by remixes," he says.

Nishad, an orchestra with two decades of solid work behind them, also sees itself losing out to the rising popularity of DJs. "Live music will never lose its charm. The difference between a live orchestra and recorded music is the same as the difference between a live play and a movie. However, live shows are becoming less popular as people are hooked to their TV sets. Especially, women who



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are glued to their back-to-back daily serials," says Nishad's founder, Chandrashekar Mahamuni. From travelling across the country and performing up to 25 shows in a month, there's hardly any demand today, he says.

He adds, "Earlier, we used to charge between Rs15,000 and Rs20,000. Today, right from the light and sound effect to theatre cost to payment of the artistes and advertisements, the total cost goes up to Rs1 lakh."

Technology has also hurt orchestras as today just three artistes with a rhythm machine and sampler are enough instead of the 10 or 12 artistes in an orchestra. "One keyboard can produce the music of a violin, trumpet, mandolin, *basuri*, and saxophone. Thus, people playing these instruments are losing their jobs," says Mahamuni. Besides, the karaoke track produces the music of all instruments and does not require musicians. Orchestra members say their tribe can survive only if the music industry sponsors and organises their shows rather frequently in various cities. Without that, there is little hope.

Small recycle step: a giant leap to save environment

Lt Col (retd) Vivek Mundkur makes furniture and household articles from scrap pinewood, thereby doing his bit for the environment. Kiran Dahitule speaks to the hobbyist carpenter

He lives his love for the environment. A hobbyist carpenter, Lt Col (retd) Vivek Mundkur, uses scrap pinewood to make beautiful furniture and household articles.

It all started about 10 years ago, when Mundkur wanted to make a small wooden cabinet. "I went to Dapodi and found a couple of shops that sell scrap pinewood, otherwise known as packaging wood. I found that it can be used to make articles and is far cheaper than other woods as it is recycled," he says.

Mundkur was happy with the first pinewood cabinet that he made and then the bug caught on. "I was happy with my success and I went on to make cupboards and tables which my wife Devika has used skillfully all over the house," he says.

While showing various objects and furniture around the house, Devika says, "I can now demand any piece of furniture and Vivek is happy to make it for me. Most of our cupboards, drawers and even our bed are made by Vivek out of scrap pinewood."

One of the interesting things that Mundkur did was to make 150 low-seating desks from scrapped pinewood for Aman Setu School. "The furniture is easy for children to handle as it is light in weight," he says. Mundkur, as a child, saw his father indulge in carpentry. "I was small but never interested then. Now, after retirement, I have developed carpentry as a hobby," he says. The furniture made by Mundkur is almost 60% cheaper than its equivalents available in the market.

According to Devika, the finishing of the wood where the pine scrap is compressed and made into planks looks great on cupboards. It looks nice on tables too, but is not easy to clean. But its natural pattern makes a beautiful design.

The Mundkurs say that there is no question about the durability as they have used it in their bed and cupboards for more than seven years now and there have been no complaints. Strongly advocating this wood for household needs, Mundkur says it is not only extremely cheap but would also go a long way in saving the environment.



Lt Col (retd) Vivek Mundkur with items made from scrap pinewood — Aniruddha Rajandekar DNA

pune's pride 8

A fragrant heaven on an incense stick

RR Dhoot and Sons has been spreading heady aromas across homes for 60 years through its avant-garde agarbattis. Renuka Deshpande reports

Such was 12-year-old Ramchandraj Dhoot's love for perfumes and incense that when he was in his early 30s, he decided to embark on a business venture that would find him immersed in the world of fragrances. This was born the renowned agarbatti shop RR Dhoot and Sons in Budhwar Peth in 1951.

When he first launched his shop, he only dealt in agarbattis and gulkand, a by-product of the extraction of rose-water from roses. He would travel all the way to Bangalore and Mysore to buy these agarbattis for the shop. Around 90% of the agarbattis that Ramchandraj initially housed were masala agarbattis, which were made from pure sandalwood and other herbs. Initially, he faced innumerable difficulties as he had to multitask, taking care of accounting, sourcing of the material and sales at the shop himself. Transport and logistics were also a problem, and delivering goods outside Pune to cities like Ahmednagar and Satara was a challenge.

With time, Ramchandraj's business



Dilip Dhoot at his shop in Budhwar Peth — Sanket Deshpande DNA

grew and with it, his range of agarbattis in the shop grew as well. Having a keen interest in the making of the product that he sold, Ramchandraj studied the manufacturing process of agarbat-

tis and started his own agarbatti unit in 1965.

The Shamsundar agarbatti brand was born of this endeavour. His wife Jasodhabai was his pillar of strength, handling

the workings at the factory while he looked after the shop. In the years that followed, Ramchandraj's son Dilip would pitch in and help in the shop as well.

In 1984, Dilip joined him in the business full-time. Dilip, who had secured a seat for a medical degree, dropped out of the course soon after he saw that his father was inconvenienced in the shop due to the lack of a pair of hands. He then did his B Com and ICWA Inter, all the while helping his father take care of the business before devoting himself to it full-time.

Dilip brought about a major change by reducing the number of cheaply priced agarbattis and primarily housing premium quality ones. "In 1984, we only made simple agarbattis, as there were no formulas for complex agarbattis then," he recalls.

The Dhoots make some 50 brands of agarbattis and the agarbattis prepared by them are unlike the ones available in the market. They burn up to two hours and their essence stays long after the agarbatti has completely burnt. Their innovations are also worthy of taking note. Says Dilip, "We were the first to

introduce an agarbatti that comprised all the material that was used in havans. Lighting one is akin to performing a havan in the house."

Then there is the Sarvashanti agarbatti made of all the herbs required for the Navagraha shanti pooja. Other agarbattis include the Karyasiddhi, Musk Ambar, Padmanabha, Kasturi Chandan and Shantiketan among others. They range from Rs300 to Rs1,500 a kg.

Dhoops are also a speciality here, besides an expanded product range that includes all kinds of pooja samagri, brass idols, attars and rudraksh necklaces.

The customer base has been ever-increasing and includes generations of families, along with foreigners, especially those who come to study yoga in the city.

Taking immense pride in his work, Dilip says, "Agarbattis purify the atmosphere in the house and are also mood enhancers. As an agarbatti seller, this makes me very proud. My two sons, who are chartered accountants, also assist me in my business. I will strive to continue spreading beautiful fragrances throughout homes."