

Film

★ Profile

Melody-Maker

MADAN
MOHAN

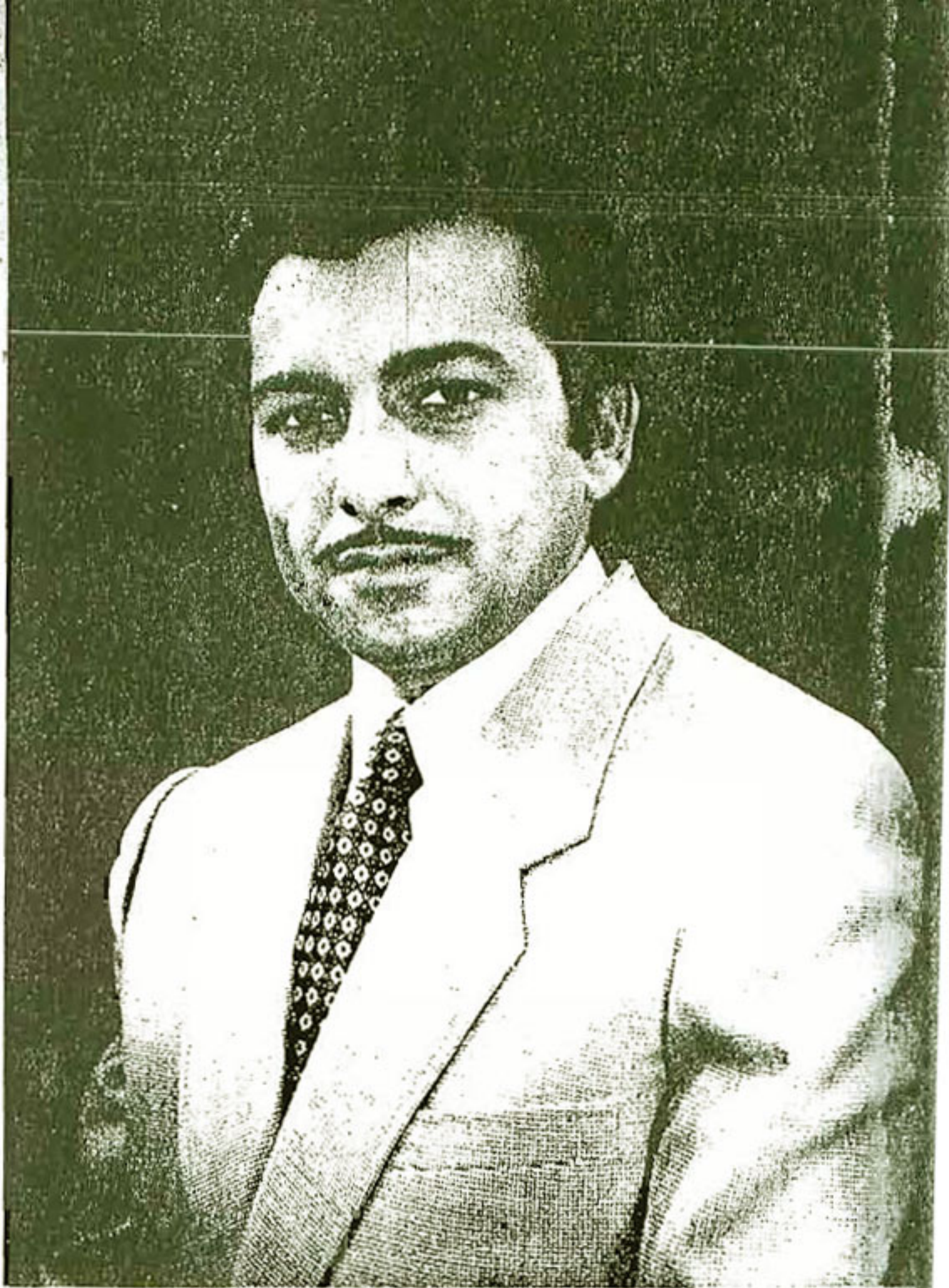
WITH his black, well-trimmed moustache extending to the corners of his mouth, his dark, curly hair combed back—side-whiskers coming down half way to the jaws—a dark shirt open at the neck, with broad sturdy shoulders and a proud glint in his eyes, young Madan Mohan needs but a rapier in his hand to make him look like the dashing Thief of Baghdad.

And then it all fits in, when with a quiet smile he announces: "I was born in Baghdad, you know." Madan's father, the late Rai Bahadur Chunilal, was an official in the Iraq police force, and Madan was born in 1924—on June 25—in the exotic, intrigue-ridden city where the lovely Scheherazade regaled Caliph Haroun-al-Rashid with romantic tales for a thousand and one nights.

With romance and old-world glamour inbred in him, Madan migrated to Bombay in 1933 when his father established residence here. Completing his high school education in 1941—at St. Mary's—young Madan was induced by his father to join the Army the following year. He was in the Artillery for two years, holding the rank of lieutenant, after which he quit.

Grateful to his father for having persuaded him to join the Army, Madan says, "Every Indian boy should be in the Army for at least one year. It's a hard, disciplined life and it moulds character."

After his brief encounter with Army life, Madan Mohan joined All India Radio in Lucknow where he was put in charge of the Hindi Music Programme. He loved the work there and it provided him with invaluable experience, but "too much red tape" and the lack of good prospects made him give it up.



Music Director Madan Mohan, bred in the industry, quit the radio for films and, while waiting for his chance to step before the cameras, wrote music scores. That was the beginning of a successful career.

Even as a school boy, Madan had been interested in broadcasting over the radio. In those days, when Z. A. Bokhari was chief of All India Radio in Bombay, Madan was one of the group of youngsters who took part in the Children's Programme every Sunday afternoon.

Also in this group were a rotund, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed boy who sang comedian Charlie's famous song "Sandal ka lagana chhod diya" with a gusto that had everyone in stitches of laughter; a thin, usually dishevelled girl whose superb voice was a treat to hear; another pretty young girl whose mellow bass voice earned her the title of "the local Greta Garbo"; and a lovely, wistful-eyed belle who was even then admired for her charm, poise and grace. The young assistant programme director was a gay, handsome chap whose infectious grin put all the young people at their ease.

All these youngsters are now famous in the film industry. The blue-eyed boy was, of course, Raj Kapoor who displayed a talent for comedy at a tender age; the thin dishevelled girl was the golden-voiced now glamorous Suraiya; the local Greta Garbo was prett-



Madan Mohan (left) conducting his musicians with playback Talaat Mahmood at the microphone

Shammi whose singing of Saigal's "Suno suno he Krishna kala" was included in the programme almost every week; and the wistful-eyed belle was the lovely Nargis. The young programme assistant was Raj Mehra, now a successful character actor. Madan Mohan used to be accompanied by his younger brother, Prakash Kohli, who became a talented cameraman but whose untimely death cut short a brilliant career.

Harking back to those days, Madan reminisces, "It's wonderful how all of us made our mark in the film industry." Although passionately fond of music, Madan was always keen on acting in films. His father was a "big name" in the film industry, a man of great influence. Yet, never once did Madan try to cash

in on his father's name. Brought up to think act and work independently, Madan preferred to enter the industry on merit rather than by influence.

In 1946, he was signed on for a role in "Purdah," but unfortunately this picture remained behind its rather significant title and was never started. In the following years, Madan Mohan concentrated on his talent for music while waiting for an opportunity to step in front of the cameras. Then, in 1950, he was assigned to do the music score of Devendra Goel's "Ankhen", in which Shekhar, too, made his debut.

Although Rai Bahadur Chunilal had always wanted his son to be a soldier, he was happy and proud that Madan had made good on



A hug from "Sugar," his huge black Alsatian, starts Madan's day.

his own merit. The music of "Ankhen" was greatly appreciated, but unfortunately the father never lived to witness his son's triumph. He passed away a month before the release of the picture.

Of the two great personal tragedies in his young life—the passing of his father and his beloved brother 'Pashi'—Madan stoically says, "Misfortune has actually done me a lot of good. It has taught me honesty and decency and made me unselfish and eager to help others."

As a music director Madan made very rapid progress. At one time he worked in seven pictures in a period of six months and was the most active member of his tribe. He considers his work in "Ashiana" to be the most successful music score. Among the films whose music he directed were "Kabataan", "Anjan", "Nirmohi", "Khubsurat", "Pehli", "Ilzam", "Dhoon" and "Chacha Chowdhary".

He recalls with horror, mingled with amusement, the time when he had simultaneously to compose the music of two "lunatic asylum" pictures which were featured in "Dhoon" and "Chacha Chowdhary". "It was a difficult task," says Madan. "Both tunes had to be different, both had to be lively, breezy and 'mad'. I almost went crazy trying to think of it. I almost went crazy composing those tunes."

Full of new ideas and essentially progressive in his work, Madan feels that music should not be stereotyped. He believes, however, that

it is not music itself, but the presentation of it, that has deteriorated. It is his contention that if a song does not grip pictorially, the audience will not really care how good the tune is. In other words, it is the situation of the song that is most important.

This young music director composes music in his leisure hours and has nearly a hundred compositions ready and waiting to be used. Trained in music by the famous Rafiq Ghaznavi, Madan continues to study and perfect himself, always striving to give the public what it wants. However, he still feels the urge to act and says he will accept a good role whenever it comes his way. So far he has acted only in "Ansoo", and he prefers serious, dramatic roles.

Some day he hopes to become a producer, and he is pretty sure he will be able to make good films. He attaches prime importance to the choice of subject and feels that a good subject will always click at the box-office.

A keen sportsman, particularly fond of badminton, Madan has few hobbies among which is what he calls "short reading". Unable to find the time to read extensively, he browses through short stories and a variety of magazines. He sees a great many films, both foreign and Indian, and keenly studies the work of other music directors.

In 1952, Madan was married to a pretty, home-loving girl who "fortunately is fond of music."