

Preview: Throw Of The Dice, Barbican, London

By Jessica Duchen

Published: 12 April 2006

For a composer to be equally at home writing pop albums, piano concertos and film music, let alone playing flamenco guitar, producing records and starring in the TV comedy *Goodness Gracious Me*, is rare.

But then, Nitin Sawhney is one of the most extraordinary, prolific figures in British music today. He has made seven albums, written 36 film and TV scores and collaborated with people such as Paul McCartney, Sting and the choreographer Akram Khan.

His new project is a departure even for him: a score for a classic 1929 silent film *Throw of the Dice*, which the London Symphony Orchestra will perform with a screening of the movie. The film, by the German director Franz Osten, is an exotic, romantic extravaganza, based on a story from the *Mahabharata* and filmed in India, complete with tigers, elephants and crocodiles.

The film, now restored by the British Film Institute, has not been seen on general release for 70 years. "It's like stepping back in time," Sawhney says. "I'm enjoying the chance to try to recreate the atmosphere of those silent films. I'm a great fan of Bernard Herrmann's film scores and have used techniques that he and composers of his era might have employed: an overture with a big tune, a web of leitmotifs and orchestration that helps to bring the different characters to life."

Sawhney, winner of the Boundary Crossing prize in the 2006 BBC Radio 3 World Music Awards, is hailed as a figurehead for music in multicultural Britain, but that isn't the way he sees himself or his work. "I grew up in Kent listening to Indian classical music, Western classical, pop, jazz, flamenco, you name it - so working in all these is natural to me," he says. "I don't separate them."

Perhaps the secret of his success is the distinctive compositional voice that gives all his music a strong, lyrical and centred quality. How would he classify his work? Sawhney smiles and says, simply: "Music."

21 April (020-7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk)