

Music & Dan

When Michael Jackson look-alike came to town

Living it up with Navi and "High Times"

FAYZA HAQ

THE new year's eve at "Sheraton Winter Garden" was as agog with light, colour, music and dancing till the wee hours as one expected. The food, served earlier, was passable -- except for the desert which was scrumptious-- specially the apple pie, for which people specially go to that particular eating place. They were skippy with the tea or coffee. But the run of the mill five star hotel food did not deter the middle aged men from dancing with strange gyrations and jerky motions with their young and beautiful companions. Similarly, the few foreigners, with their gold caps and gold whistling paper, pranced about on the floor as the band "High Times" and Navi (the Michael Jackson look-alike) belted out favourite songs of the 80s with the accompaniment of the drums, keyboard and guitar. Young women with tinted hair, layers of make-up and the short ensembles of "shalwar-kameez" or jeans and leather jackets, junk jewellery and six-inched heels were there with their suitable partners too. Even at 1am, people were crowding and stampeding to get onto the dance floor after the dinner, such is the penchant for dancing in public by the upper echelons of the society.

The young women singers with their body-hugging blouses, draped gold belts and black slacks were partly imported phenomena while the rest of the players seemed the usual handful of young aspirants in the band music field, with the background music sometimes drowning the rendering of Madonna and Michael Jackson songs. The lights flashed behind and on the singers as well as on the dancers from time to time while the merry-makers, in the overtly western trend, danced the night away, impervious to the cold and any possible misery of the masses, not so far away in their slum hovels. "High Times" has earlier sung for charity but this was not such an occasion. It was all fun and frolic, impervious to any



Members of "High Times" performing at "Sheraton Winter Garden"

prevailing socio-economic or political problems gathering momentum in the city. Imran, who organised the function, putting it pithy words, said, "The purpose of the dancing and singing was to celebrate the new year in a congenial atmosphere. The exclusive element is the presence of the look-alike Michael Jackson dancer and singer Navi. The band is that of the Omar, the younger brother of Faisal Siddiqui, Omar's wife Azra and others."

Omar, sitting in the green room after her performance after midnight, surrounded by snacks, smoke and drink, said, "My whole family is into music. My brother Bogey, was with 'Renaissance' and he is the president of Bangladesh Association of Band Music (BAMBA). Our band, 'High Times' has at present five members, including Sody, Azra, Mehdi, Shadib and Rumi. Mehdi plays the keyboard, Shadib plays the guitar, Sody on bass guitar, Rumi plays the drums while Azra and her sister Nadia, who is returning from USA, are the vocals. Our group normally performs in big functions such as this. As a graphic designer by profession, I cannot have as many performances as I might have wanted."

"Azra, my wife is a physician and is working at present with public health and was with a project run by UNICEF, which has recently ended.

She had graduated last year as a medical doctor from the Caribbean Island, having graduated from the Dominican Republic. She was born and raised in USA, earlier."

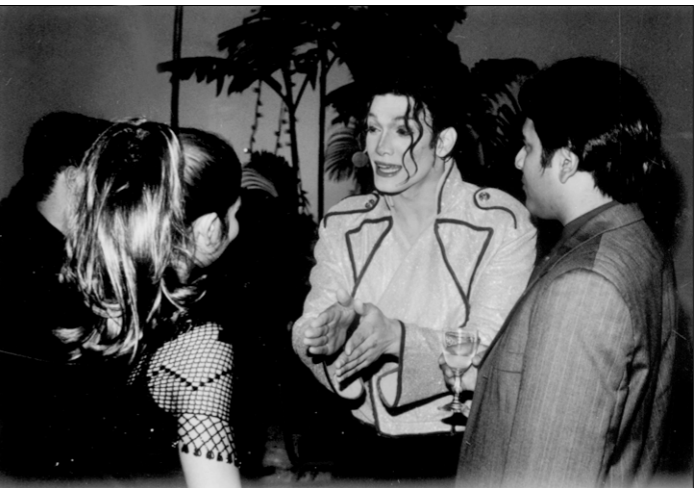
Omar added, "I come from a musical family. My elder brother Guchu began 'Chaos' while the other, Bogey is in 'Renaissance', as I said earlier. My uncle Pablo Khan is also involved in music and he first began with 'Feelings' and it is he who discovered James of 'Nogor Baul' and Protik Nabi, a Bengali pop singer who is a big hit right now."

Asked to comment on the culture of band and pop music, Omar said, "There is a big group of people who want to hear English music. The problem with our country now is that we have only new Bengali bands coming up and so I got together with my old school friend Shadib, the guitarist, friend 'High Times' and my wife joined me later. We've been married for two years now. As Azra speaks Spanish fluently, we use that as an advantage, as we do a lot of Latin pop and jazz numbers. We generate the songs of the 80s and play music which is popular with a particular generation and not just the teenagers, as there is a void for this type of music in the market right now. Right now Kylie Minogue and Michael Jackson along with Madonna are still very much in vogue. We just don't play what is popular but what we like and what

we qualify as good music. On New Year we presented Madonna numbers like 'Lisla Bonita', 'Music', 'Can't get you out of my head' by Kylie Minogue. As live performances they appear appealing and people can dance with these numbers. We play at celebration balls, at charity show, on Halloween, to raise funds for the underprivileged, at clubs such as the International Club. We can perform once or twice a month as both my wife and I are totally preoccupied otherwise."

Saying something about his work as a graphic designer, Omar said, "We try to focus on providing people with designs at competitive rates. I'm trying to be a success in Dhaka in the web and print media. My organization is called 'Image Nation'. I expect our future concerts will include more of our participation even as regards the lighting, acoustics, setting up of the ambiance etc. I was satisfied with my performance today and wished that I could play a bit longer. In bringing the look-alike Michael Jackson, I've tried to introduce the king of pop to the people here."

Giving his impression of band music in Bangladesh, Omar said, "The problem is that people are just listening to Bengali music of James and 'LRB'. It limits the listener's imagination to that genre of music. For Bengali music to flourish, one can't listen to international music so that one's vision tends to shrink. We want to give the audience what other bands cannot offer. We offered Madonna's 'Lisla Bonita' and 'You sigo aqui' (I'm still here) and it is by Paulina Rubio. We began in 1997 as a classic rock band inspired by 'Pink Floyd' and we hope to do a 'Pink Floyd' show within a month. Shadib on the guitar is amazing when he plays 'Pink Floyd' and I think this will carry us a long way. Mehdi, who plays the keyboard, who was playing in Canada for the top 40s in the chart therefore quite some time is here to help us out. People in Dhaka are a little tired of the DJ scene and the thumping new electronic music. Rumi, our drummer, is promising too. They



Navi (Michael Jackson look-alike) speaking with ardent fans

long now for the music of the 80s and 90s, the music that they had heard when they were growing up, and that is why live music of this type at this point is something very popular. We perform for fun: it's not our full time job, so we aren't aiming at TV performances. Likewise, we've no compositions of our own so far. It's been six months when we got together again, so there is all that future us."

"In future, instead of playing at parties, we hope to have our own concerts. We're available for private performances too at homes, should anyone back us. We do get compensated for our efforts and so we enjoy this hobby of ours quite immensely. There are other bands like us such as 'Pentagon', 'Miles' etc. But we are the ones that play western music only, I believe. Rumi, who was once with 'Renaissance' and who plays regularly at Alliance Francaise etc is not so familiar to me, incidentally. In Bangladesh it is hard to make a profession out of music so we let it at that."

Azra said, "I got into music basically by singing on my own since I was nine years old; however, I have no classical or formal training. It was in the family, as my father used to sing and so it grew to be my hobby. I have performed in public before many times, as a child with my father, and as I grew older I sang

at college functions with an audience of about 700 people. I use to sing 'qawwalis' and Hindi film songs which were very much in demand in USA by the migrant community there as well as the American fans of Indian songs. My favourite numbers were 'Tere bian kia jina', 'Chura lia hai tumne hai dil ko' and 'O sathee ray' Now that I'm here I'm singing more of English as well as Latin numbers, as I also speak Spanish. This was at the University of North Carolina, USA, where I was studying Chemistry and Psychology. It was later that I went to medical school at the Dominican Republic for five years: there too I performed for the Indian community there."

"The response overseas to Indian film songs was overwhelming as I usually performed at Indian functions so that the Indian crowd felt nostalgic and raved about my singing as they tend to be so homesick abroad. However, there were some westerners who came along and appreciated the music too, as recently there has been the trend to go in for Indian culture in the west, the Middle East and other places on the globe. The outsiders find Hindi songs exotic and beautifully, and if they have people to help them understand the words they realize that the words are very meaningful. A lot of people in my university were taking Hindi and Urdu classes and

they naturally grasped a lot of the meaning of the songs. My own parents are from India and I myself speak Hindi and Urdu quite fluently."

Navi, the piece de resistance of the show sang "Billy Jeans" etc: danced till sweat poured over his face, was "gorgeous, sexy and the best dancer on the face of the earth", as one female fan put it. Navi said, "I love what I'm doing very much as I'm a fan of Michel Jackson. I've been impersonating him for 13 years. I have my own backing of dancers and singers and am not usually with any band. I learnt dancing on my own by watching Michael Jackson's videos all the time, for years. I have performed in front of him in New York, last year. This was a tribute to Michael Jackson. I'm fascinated by MJ because I think he is a great entertainer. Michael Jackson, in my opinion, is a victim of his own success. He went into show business when he was five years old. He has never quite been the everyday person: he is different and what we call 'strange' as he sees life as an experiment, to create music and videos. He's enjoying himself now as he is the father of three children. I'm originally from the Caribbean Islands and I'm friends with this group and that's why I'm here. I've been in Bangladesh as a guest and for a holiday; I think Bangladesh is fantastic: I love the food, the swirl of the traditional clothes and I believe that the people are extremely friendly. I look forward to coming again: in the meantime I hope to do some shopping and sight-seeing before I leave."

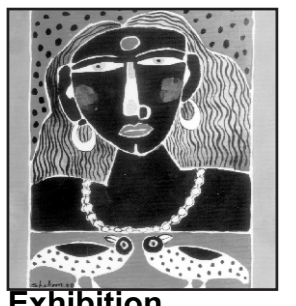
The night of the performance was worthwhile in as much that one got to know the personalities of Navi and the band. One also got an opportunity to witness how some of the elite pass their leisure hours and celebrate something as important as a new year's eve.

RECOMMENDATIONS



15th National Fine Arts Exhibition 2002

December 28-January 27 The 15th National Fine Arts Exhibition 2002 started on December 28 at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. At the exhibition several awards including Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Award 2002 for the Best Work, Bengal Foundation Award, Arab Bangladesh Bank Award, Deepa Haque Award, Bashundhara Group Award and Pacific Group Gold Medal will be declared. Honourable President Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed will inaugurate the exhibition. The exhibition will run through January 27 everyday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Fridays.



Exhibition December 27-January 8

A solo exhibition of paintings by A H M Bashirullah started at the Alliance Francaise de Dacca on December 27. The exhibition will remain open for visitors up to January 8 everyday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

TV GUIDE

Table with columns for channel (BTV, HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.

Table with columns for channel (HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.

Table with columns for channel (HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS section featuring Star Movies (8.45 p.m. Last Dance) and HBO (12.30 a.m. The Last Seduction) with promotional images and descriptions.

Table with columns for channel (BTV, HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.

PICK OF THE DAY section featuring Batman & Robin on HBO at 10.00 p.m. with promotional images and a detailed synopsis.

Table with columns for channel (BTV, HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.

Table with columns for channel (BTV, HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.

Table with columns for channel (BTV, HBO, AXN, STAR MOVIES, SET MAX, ADVENTURE ONE, SONY) and program details including time and title.