

In conversation

Down memory lane with Fahmida Nabi

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

FAHMIDA and Samina, fondly known in close circles as Numa and Shuma are the two-multi talented daughters of one of Bangladesh's most gifted singers, Mahmud-Un Nabi.

Fahmida Nabi was born in Dinajpur at her grandparent's house, locally known as 'Shaht Shundorir Bari' or 'Home of the Seven Beauties'. The renowned home exemplified the rich cultural heritage of succeeding generations of the family. Her earliest memory of the place is of a house brimming with fun and frolic, laughter and musical gatherings with her father leading the pack. Being brought up in such an edifying, cultivated, well-refined family Fahmida feels that she never needed that extra grooming to become an artiste. It was already in her genes. Their house was a common platform for artistes to come and be part of this musical soiree.

As a child, Fahmida recalls her days spent with local boys as a total daredevil. Stealing flowers and guavas from neighbors' gardens on rainy days was common place. During such excursions Fahmida would take the lead with Samina close behind as the assistant. They had foolproof action plans for these excavations so that they would not get caught.

While Samina was the studious one between the two sisters aiming to be a doctor, it was always Fahmida's dream to be an artiste. However, friends and family had written her off as she used to shriek and scream around the house, abusing her vocal chords to their limits. "However, songs were in my veins and at the age of eight when I heard Lata Mangeshkar sing *Na mon lagey na*, my soul ached and searched for something more," reminisces Fahmida.

Her sleep would break at the crack of



Fahmida Nabi

dawn with her father doing 'rewaaz'... *sa re ga ma* on his harmonium, recalls Fahmida. She learnt the beauty of fusion from her father who was a master in modern as well as classical songs. She fondly recalls Lucky *Chacha* (Lucky Akhand) coming to their house with his musical instruments and playing them in

non-conventional styles. All of this had an impact on her own music.

In a gathering of artiste families, Fahmida sung her first song *Mayer sneho gelo* with sister Samina. It was a song composed by their father and finally a small dream had come true. That she could ever have a career apart

from singing had never occurred to this multi lingual singer. On answering a question regarding competition between her and Samina, Fahmida admits that Samina is a competitor as far as singing is concerned, but there had never been any personal rivalry between the sisters.

It was Mahmud-Un Nabi's simplicity and humble nature that struck Fahmida and made her realise what a great artiste her father was. Fahmida believes that her father is still alive through his children. Being an MA degree holder in philosophy, she thinks that when people die, it's only their body, which leaves the earth; the minds relocate to someone else. Similarly her father's mind had transpired to theirs.

Fahmida has teamed up with Napin Music (an audio production house); where for the first time in Bangladesh young artistes will get a chance to practice their vocal chords on microphones. The institute's main objective is to teach the technique of throwing and grooming voices. The opening is on June 1, 2006.

Music is something so pure; there isn't scope for cheap music to survive, it will die a natural death philosophises the perfectionist Fahmida. In her words, "I don't believe in a few seconds fame neither do I sing to be famous. I have always drawn my inspiration from songs. I close my eyes and through a maze I enter into the hearts of my songs and sing. It takes me to impossible heights of clarity."

Today she sings for her daughter. "I feel that I have to give the best I can for my daughter's sake. I don't know whether I am my father's opposite daughter, but I do know that I want my daughter to be proud of me."

Shukla Sarkar

Undisputed talent despite a low profile

KAVITA CHARANJI

"Bharatnatyam is a complete dance in the sense that it encompasses *taal* (rhythm), *bhava* (emotion), *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment) and *abhinaya* (acting). The genre gives the dancer scope to express herself through all these elements," says seasoned Bharatnatyam dancer Shukla Sarkar. Since she was ill at ease in English, The Daily Star conducted the interview through one of Shukla's students, Srimonti Sengupta Pooja. According to Pooja, Shukla has several claims to fame- as the first guru to introduce the concept of *Aranggram* (akin to convocation) in Bangladesh, the first to bring Bharatnatyam to the country and a front ranker in the dance school firmament with the regular students of her institute Dhruvad Kala Kendra.

Shukla is a name to reckon with in the sphere of dance. Her art form has taken her to distant climes. She has performed in cultural delegations from Shilpakala Academy to Malaysia, (1985), London (1989), Japan (1990), Russia and Turkey (1993) and China (2005). Likewise, she has bagged many an award-among them the BACHSHAS (Bangladesh Film Journalists' Association), Sher-e-Bangla award, Jasimuddin award and an award from the Bangladesh Dancers' Association.

Currently, Shukla, the founder-director of Dhruvad Kala Kendra, has 60 regular students of Bharatnatyam. That's not bad considering that when she first performed on BTV in 1983, people were skeptical about the dance form-even to the extent of questioning the attire. Today, as she says, more people are interested in Bharatnatyam-though their number remains small.

What's next for Shukla? She says she aspires to have a larger institution with an auditorium. She also seeks to carry out research on dance.

Her students vouch for her commitment to her medium. As Pooja, a student of physics at Dhaka University, says, "I have learnt to regard dance as a form of worship. Dhruvad Kala Kendra seeks to promote Bharatnatyam in a scenario where TV channels and modelling tend to lure away



Shukla Sarkar

young talents."

To Shukla goes the credit for grooming a new generation of dedicated dancers like Pooja. She has given a much boost to

Bharatnatyam and achieved recognition -- despite her preference for a low profile in the world of dance.

Exhibition

Forms and flourishes with surpassing rhythm



(L-R) *Boishakhee* by Nasreen Begum, *To Nazrul* by Nazrul Islam Aghrani and an untitled work by Jamal Ahmed

FAYZA HAQ

"Harmony", an exhibition of contemporary art of Bangladesh and Europe was recently held at the Alliance Francaise gallery. The paintings, pulsating with colour and lines, were splendid indeed.

Jamal Ahmed has combined acrylic with pastel in his delineation of pigeons. The colours have captured the movement of the feathers. "I am fascinated when I come across birds and see their various delicate movements, as they fly about," says Jamal. "My earlier works had the pigeon like some individual study, but here the group has been taken as a whole," he adds.

Rashid Amin has used etching in his work and it includes a collection of dark lines. The light colours next to them set them off. Nisar Hossain has brought in different effects in the visual medium that he has presented. He has used the cheap plastic printed cloth that is often seen in the villages and in rickshaws. They contain Islamic motifs as Nisar depicts the fundamentalists and calls his work *Killer in the Garden*. He has used primary colours in acrylic and so there is a change in his technique.

Mohammed Eunus has brought



in images of old walls in his work, calling it *Reality*. "The old wall is a symbol of society, where there is no security or certainty. There is the desire to improve the situation but

there is no real move towards it," Eunus says. The painting is in acrylic and brings to mind the rusted and mottled hues on neglected walls. Muniuzzaman says, "I've

tried to bring in the depiction of mud walls in my *Image of time*. The medium is water colour and I've tried to depict the element of dissatisfaction and insecurity in our society. Kanak Chanpa Chakma has used brought in mixed media in her painting, where she has pasted hand-made paper on her background and worked over it. "Thus I have a new medium and I enjoy doing something fresh. I've depicted tribal life but with a nouveau approach," she says. The effect was lyrical indeed. By using a lot of symbols, Atia Islam Anne has once again hit out against fundamentalism in her *Society*. Atia's surrealist work hits out boldly against evil and wrongdoing.

Murshida Arju Alpina, who lives and works in Berlin, says, "I longed to see the Bangladesh storm after more than a decade in Germany. *Boishakhi storm* has lines and colours to depict the force of the lashing storm. This is a part of a series that say 'Before the storm' and 'After the storm'. To bring in the element of heat just before the storm, Arju has brought in free and forceful streaks of red and yellow along with salmon pink. The tossing, turning and swinging of tree branches have also been included.

A Rahman, who spends many months in Italy, has his *Lethal cham-*



ber in which he depicts mankind's turmoil and travails. It depicts a man carrying an elephant on his back with overwhelming signals flashing in the backdrop. Bruno Ruhf from

France has also joined the display with his mind-whirling *Clown*. The exhibition ends on May 15.

Ibsen reflected on canvas

ERSHAD KAMOL

Thirty-two prominent artists of Bangladesh have reconstructed the theme and characters of Henrik Ibsen's plays in their distinctive style. The 10-day unique exhibition, titled 'Images of Ibsen's Life and Plays' began on May 10 at the National Art Gallery, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

Each of the canvases on display is a representation of Ibsen's plays. Renowned artists have focused on the ideas of freedom, discrimination against women and identity crisis -- common features in Ibsen's plays such as *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Peer Gynt* and *Brand*.

Dhali Al Mamoon's canvas, titled *Antor-e Bahir-e* represents the urge for ultimate freedom, which is elusive. In course of portraying this message, he has created three shadows of human figures on bright colours like red, black and yellow. Harold Rashid's interpretation of the play *Peer Gynt* on his canvas, titled *Beyond Redemption* is another interesting piece. He has portrayed the identity crisis through an image of an eagle carrying a burning globe away from the symphony of the cosmos.

Zahid Ali Chowdhury has reconstructed the theme of Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler* with oriental connotation. He has created an image of two female characters -- Hedda Gabler and Tagore's character Chitragada



Beyond Redemption by Harold Rashid

-- on the canvas with oriental costumes to make the play relevant even in the socio-cultural scenario of this part of the world.

Interestingly most of the painters who have dealt with women's issues have symbolically represented the urge for freedom in the male-dominated society by the images of women and birds.

Mansurul Karim's painting, titled *Beginning of the Path* is the saga of Ibsen's mission to free men from the darkness that falls when religion is misused. The aim is to create a secular world. Moreover, there are five portraits of Ibsen on display.

In addition, an installation display, titled 'To be a poet is to see Ibsen in our time' is also on. The works are by Norwegian artists.

Norwegian Ambassador Aud Lise Norheim inaugurated the exhibition in which eminent artists of the country, Murtaja Baseer and Syed Jamaluddin carried out discussions. Earlier three books -- *Ibsener Nari* and *Ibsener Natok O Kabita* edited by Selina Hossain and *Ibsener Kabita* by Anisur Rahman were launched.

In memoriam

The haunting tunes of Naushad

SHAHNOOR WAHID

Chaley aaj hum jahanse, hai zindagi parayee Tumhe mil gaya thikana humey maut bhi na aye...

Who else but music director Naushad could pour so much of pathos, so much of melancholy in the lyrics to touch one's soul in such a special way? The song from the film *Uran Khatola* had broken all previous chart records of the time. He outshines himself as a composer, especially when the tune changes cadence in this song at the line, "Kis kaamki ye duniya jo zindagisey kheyley"

Naushad gave tune to songs in the film *Anmol Ghadi* and all the songs of that film became instant hits. One is automatically taken on a trip down memory lane when the songs of that film like *Keya mil gaya Bhagwan mere dilko dukhakey* or *Aaja merey barbaad mohabbatke saharey* reach the ears over the din of city life.

Then came the romantic melody, *Tu Ganga ke mouj mein Jamunaki dhara*. This song from *Baju Bawra* and the others in the same film like *O duniyake rakhowale, sun dard bharey mere naley* astounded the music critics for his skill in blending classical raga with *desi* (indigenous) tunes. In fact, it has been said by the

critics that the haunting songs of *Baju Bawra* carried the film all through to box office.

He composed music for the big-budget film *Aan*, with Dilip Kumar and debutante Nadira in the lead roles. It was once again for songs like *Dilme chhupake peyarka tufan le chale* or *Muhabbat chume jinki haath* that film-lovers went back to the movie theatres again and again.

Naushad was one of the few greats who dominated the Bombay film music arena from as early as the '40s till the mid-'60s. C Ramchand, Khayyam, Shankar Jaikishan and Laxmikant Pyarelal were his contemporaries. Naushad was very young when he came to Bombay from Lucknow and started to give tunes to film songs. As he had a strong classical base and profound knowledge on the various *desi* genres of music, especially of north India, his music sounded different for its rich variety in tune fused with uniquely created background orchestration.

Mahal (the number *Kahi dip jale kahi dil* actually shot Lata to the dizzy heights of fame), *Andaaz*, *Babul*, *Dillagi*, *Dulari*, *Didar*, *Mughal-e-Azam* (featuring the Lata greats: *Mohabbat kijhooti kahani pe royey* and *Pyaar kiya to dama kya*), *Mother India*, *Ganga Jamuna*, *Ram Aur Shyam*, *Admi*, *Pakeezah* are some of his films whose music



Naushad (R) with Lata Mangeshkar at a function

became a phenomenal success.

Here is an interesting story about Naushad. One day an unknown plump lady came to his house and requested him to create a song for her as she had come all the way from a village to be a singer. He asked her to sing a few lines of some

songs. Somehow he liked her voice. Then he got a song written by a friend and composed the tune. When the record of the song was released it took every listener by surprise. It was an absolute stunner. The beautiful song went like this...*Afsana likh rahey hain dil-*

beqaraarka, akhon mein rang ubharkey tera intezaarka. The singer was Uma Devi. But later people of India were surprised when they discovered that she was none but the 'horizontally challenged' comedienne Tun Tun.

From the mid-'60s and onward Naushad did not get many films. However, after a brief lull he came back to complete the unfinished work of music director Ustad Ghulam Mohammed in the film *Pakeezah* in 1972 and reconfirmed the fact that he was a true maestro. Who can forget the time-transcending songs like *Inhi logoney ley liya dupatta mera* or *Chalte chalte yuhin koi milgaya tha?*

Naushad's songs not only attained popularity in India, they traversed all man-made boundaries to reach the discerning audience in all the neighbouring states and even beyond.

Naushad Ali was given the most prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award for his contribution to Indian cinema. The last film that Naushad composed music for was Akbar Khan's *Taj Mahal: An Eternal Love Story* (2005). He passed away in Mumbai on May 5, 2006.

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