

# Bengal Bikash: Ushering in new talents



Adrita Anwar (a recipient of *Sreshtha Maan*) performs at the event, also seen are Sukanto Chakravarty and Shimu Rani De



Feroza Begum (R) seen with award recipients in Nazrul songs category

## CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

RESULTS of the talent search *Bengal Bikash*, organised by Bengal Foundation, were announced at the National Museum on September 6. No unnecessary extravagant set, no make over, no stress on the contestants to focus on attributes other than singing, always starting right on time (a trait that seems to be alien in most cultural programmes) and highlighting songs that are deeply rooted in our culture and heritage made the talent search much appreciated.

The competition had a modest start in May 2005. The competition was held in five categories: Tagore songs, Nazrul songs, songs of D L Roy, Rajnikant Sen and Atul Prasad, folk songs and *adhunika* songs.

*Bengal Bikash* contestants were divided in zones (i.e. Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and so on). From the regional rounds 239 contestants were selected to take part in pre-finals. From pre-finals

100 talented young artists were selected after extensive scrutiny and meticulous judging. The finals were held from September 2 to 5. Gruelling practice sessions, tough evaluations, enthusiasm and talent abound -- on September 6 it all came down to top 15 receiving *Sreshtha Maan*, 15 receiving *Uttam Maan* and the rest of the 100 receiving *Shaphal Maan*. The event began with Tagore exponent Wahidul Haque (in charge of *Bengal Bikash* advisory board) sharing his views on the competition. Luva Nahid Chowdhury, director of Bengal Foundation, expressed her gratitude to cultural personalities, print media and everyone working for the talent search. Students of Parampara performed a *khayal* in Raga Emon.

Wahidul Haque handed over crests and certificates to contestants -- Shimu Rani De (Dhaka), Sukanto Chakravarty (Comilla) and Adrita Anwar (Dhaka) -- receiving *Sreshtha Maan*. Farheen Nusrat Joyita (Dhaka), Shuma Rani Roy and Biswajit Sengupta received

## Uttam Maan.

Legendary Nazrul singer Feroza Begum distributed crests and certificates among the contestants in Nazrul song category. The veteran artist in her speech pointed out that the chorus rendition of the Nazrul song *Joi hok, joi hok*, by the 20 finalists could have been performed in a more organised manner. A K M Shahid Kabir (Dhaka), Fahmida Rahman (Chittagong) and Debosri Antara Das (Dhaka) received *Uttam Maan*. Anindita Chowdhury (Sylhet), Muhammad Anisur Rahman (Narayanganj) and Champa Banik (Dhaka) received *Sreshtha Maan*.

Finalists in the category -- songs of D L Roy, Rajnikant Sen and Atul Prasad received crests and certificates from noted artist Mustafa Monwar. Champa Banik, Nilufar Jahan (Dhaka) and Shimu Rani De received *Uttam Maan* while Anindita Chowdhury, Bhuiyan Mohammad Nurul Anwar Kamol (Dhaka) and Farhana Rahman earned *Sreshtha Maan*. Seasoned folk artiste Bidit Lal Das handed over crests and certificates

to finalists in folk song category. Biman Chandra Biswas (Dhaka), Sheela Das (Feni) and Maruf Hasan Emon (Mymensingh) received *Uttam Maan*; Haleema Parveen (Dhaka), Shafiqul Alam Raja (Dhaka) and Mohammad Anifur Rahman (Rajshahi) received *Sreshtha Maan*. Sabina Yasmeen, famed for numerous popular playbacks and *adhunika* songs handed over crests and certificates among finalists in *adhunika* songs category. Mohammad Arifuzzaman (Khulna), Shimu Rani De and Fahmida Rahman received *Uttam Maan*, while Nahid Sultana (Khulna), A K M Shahid Kabir and Sumona Rahman (Meherpur) received *Sreshtha Maan*. After repeated requests from the packed auditorium, Sabina sang a few lines of *O majhi nao chhaira dey*, accompanied by the finalists.

Other treats for the audience included a dance presentation with the theme song of *Bengal Bikash* and a music video made for the talent search (by Annob).

# Abul Khair Litu The name behind 'Bengal Bikash'

## KARIM WAHEED

In an interview with *The Daily Star*, Abul Khair Litu, chairman of Bengal Foundation, recollected how *Bengal Bikash* began. "We conceived the idea of a talent search before the trend started in our country. It was in 2003 and we decided to start a competition at grassroots level to bring to light promising young artists and give them a platform. However, we couldn't find a partner in the electronic media and in the mean time other talent hunts started on TV," says Khair.

He adds, "It's not like we didn't find interested TV channels but the deal was we had to comply with their terms. It is understandable that when it comes to TV, there is the obvious aspect of commercial viability; glitz and glamour sell. But we believe a true artist should only concentrate on his/her craft. Unlike other competitions *Bengal Bikash* doesn't prefer the term 'star search'; we never claimed to make stars out of these impressionable youngsters. Bengal wants to find and nurture these talents so they can become true artists."

"We also disagreed with interested TV channels regarding the process of judging the contestants. They wanted 60 percent of the total point to come from the judges and the rest from public votes (SMS) and we feel this is not the proper way to judge. Aspiring artists should be judged by veteran artists who have immense knowledge of the art form."

Is the end result satisfactory? Khair says, "I am content with the way it all turned out. We have received tremendous support from the newspapers and leading artists of the country. Most importantly, the competition is a success because Luva Nahid Chowdhury (director of Bengal Foundation) and her group that included Khalid Hasan, Bulbul Islam, Mahbub Alam Pallab and others have worked tirelessly day in day out; to them *Bengal Bikash* is a labour of love."

How will Bengal Foundation nurture these budding talents? Khair: "We plan to groom all of the 100 top contestants. Initially there were two groups: *Sreshtha Maan* (best three contestants from each of the five categories; in total 15) and *Shaphal Maan*. However, the average standard of the finalists was so impressive that we decided to acknowledge three contestants from each category who missed the *Sreshtha Maan* for a few points. The group is called *Uttam Maan*. Each contestant receiving the *Sreshtha Maan* will be awarded Taka 30,000 and recipients of *Uttam Maan* will get Taka 15,000 each. Bengal Foundation will provide workshops for the 70 participants in the *Shaphal Maan* group. The top 30 will receive scholarships to study music in prestigious schools. Bengal Foundation will make albums featuring these promising singers."

Will the finals be aired on TV? Khair says, "We have plans to do that but on our own terms."

Bengal Music Company, (a concern of Bengal Foundation to promote bands and young musicians) is recording the finals. We will make episodes of them. We haven't decided on the TV channel as of yet."

Bengal Foundation's endeavours to uphold and foster our culture and artists are multifaceted. Bengal operates a workshop titled *Parampara*, conducted by Ustad Mashqur Ali Khan, on classical music. Artists are provided with scholarships at music schools of their choice. Apart from these, Bengal produces quality music albums of promising as well as noted artists. According to Abul Khair, Bengal has taken initiatives to provide scholarships to

campers. Bengal has also ventured into publication. *Jamini* (on Bangladeshi and international art) has received accolades in home and abroad. *Kali O Kalam* (a publication of literature) is well-accepted among readers as well.

Khair, an art collector with a collection of 5,000 paintings, says, "We have plans to open up a museum. Eighty percent of my collection now belongs to Bengal. We're trying to set up the museum in Dhaka. Savar is our next choice. Initially the museum will focus on exhibiting, preserving and renovating artworks."

How did his love affair with Bangladeshi art begin? A smiling Khair responds, "I can't quite put my finger on any 'golden moment'. My



Abul Khair Litu

PHOTO: STAR

instrumentalists as our country is in dire need of musicians who are skilled in traditional musical instruments like *sarod*, *santoor*, *esraj* or *sarang*.

Bengal is also active in the theatre circuit. In collaboration with group Theatre Federation, Bengal provides patronage to theatre groups and organises workshops. Theatre groups from outside Dhaka receive financial assistance for their productions.

Bengal Foundation plays a key role in showcasing and promoting our local painters and art through regular exhibitions and art

mother was a painter. As a child, when we used live in Shantinagar, I frequently visited Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin's home. I didn't realise how but perhaps it was under his influence that I developed an appreciation for art. Renowned artists Sohrab Hossain and Ustaf Phool Muhammad were our neighbours. I remember hearing them sing. That must have refined my taste in music."

Says Khair, "We at Bengal, believe as a nation we are quite advanced in art and literature. We just have to highlight and promote it to the world."

## Event

# Tunes from Land of The Rising Sun



AHSAN HABIB

A musical programme titled, 'Hogaku: Japanese Traditional Music Today' was held at National Theatre Stage, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on September 6. The event was organised by the Embassy of Japan while the Japan Foundation was the sponsor.

The concert highlighted the classical compositions as well as experimental works of many Japanese musicians in recent years. Thus the programme featured evolution of traditional music.

The word *hogaku* (literally, Japanese music) is commonly used to describe not one style of music but rather any composition created with traditional Japanese instruments. The *Koto* (a six-foot long instrument with 13 strings), *Shakuhachi* (a five-hole bamboo flute), and *Shamisen* (a banjo-like instrument with three strings) are the most common, although *hogaku* also includes traditional drums, a variety of flutes, the *biwa* (four-string lute) and the *Sho* and *hichiriki* -- two reed instruments. Thus, current *hogaku* music incorporates everything from traditional *gagaku* (Japanese court music) to folk songs to popular tunes.



In the concert, Ai Kajigano, Hiromu Motonaga and Naoyuki Manabe, Japanese maestros of traditional musical instruments played *Koto*, *Shakuhachi* and *Sho*.

The performance began with *Haru no Umi* (spring ocean), one of the most popular Japanese numbers. This number, composed by Michio Miyagi, is an essential part of musical concerts during New Year celebrations.

The next piece, *Ichikotsucho no choshi*, said to be composed around 1000 years ago (though the composer is unknown), was a solo recital of *Sho* by Manabe.

*Tsuru no Sugomori*, composed around 500 years ago, was a number deeply related to Zen, a kind of meditation. Montana, the *Shakuhachi* player in traditional Japanese dress performed the profound, meditative number.

More recent compositions were performed then. Kajigano performed *Jyogen no Kyoku*, composed by Tadao Sawai in 1979. Classic melodies were used a lot in the number.

Clockwise (from left): Ai Kajigano on *Koto*, Hiromu Motonaga on *Shakuhachi* and Japanese diplomat Yusuke rendering a Bengali song

PHOTO: STAR



The contemporary compositions praise modernity with various techniques while remaining rooted in tradition. Sustained sounds have been used a lot for *Sho*, but Manabe adopted fast passages in *Kokyu III*. Though *Shakuhachi* had used to be for meditation, in *Mumyo*, Motonaga sought infinite freedom in the instrument. *Dosei*, composed by rock guitarist Hikaru Sawai, expressed two kinds of voices originated from the earth. *Sho '83* were performed along with *tabla* in addition to *Sho*, *Koto* and *Shakuhachi* in the fusion number.

The instrumentalists appeared in traditional dresses when performing classical pieces. While performing contemporary numbers they wore modern attire, which made their presentation attractive.

A surprise for the Bangladeshi audience was a rendition of the familiar song *Bangla-e gaan gai* by Japanese musicians. The programme was a reflection of cordial cultural relations between Japan and Bangladesh.

## TV Watch

# Drama serial 'Mallodan' on ATN Bangla

Aruna Biswas' recent serial *Mallodan* has hit the small screen. The serial is based on a literary work by Rabindranath Tagore. Global media are the producers.

The story revolves around a childless couple, Potal and her husband. One day Potal finds an orphan on the streets and brings her back home. She loves the child like her own daughter though her husband has his doubts as they do not know the young one's background. Potal's brother, a doctor, comes to visit them and Potal wants her brother to marry the orphan. Back in those days girls used to get married early by the age of 14-15. The brother was surprised at such a suggestion and refused. However fate brings them back in the same hospital after a few years.

Talking about the serial, Aruna says, "Whether they get together ultimately is something the viewers will have to find out for themselves. I play the lead character Potal. Al Mamun plays the character of a deputy magistrate, Mousumi Biswas plays the character of the orphan and Sohaid plays the character of the doctor. I am also the director of the serial. We all put in hard work as it was a challenge to do justice to Tagore's work."



Aruna Biswas in *Mallodan*

# Ongoing German film festival at Goethe-Institut

## ERSHAD KAMOL

Goethe-Institut Dhaka and Dhaka University Film Society have organised screening of quality contemporary German movies.

The movies selected for the sessions basically feature different facets of the lives of the younger generation--growing up, identity, migration, love, change, reconciliation and search--after the fall of Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany.

These are the issues of the protagonists. Different people are confronted with different challenges at different times and different places. However, they are connected in some way. Their common world is about to change. They had to change themselves as they are falling in love, dealing with the fall of the Berlin Wall and struggle to find their own identity in a uneasy world.

Movies selected for the special film session are *Wir Können Auch Anders* (1993) directed by Detlev Buck, *Lichter* (2003) directed by Hans-Christian Schmid, *Klassenfahrt* (2002) directed by Henner Winckler, *Absolute Giganten* (1999) directed by Sebastian Schipper, *Good Bye*

*Lenin!* (2003) directed by Wolfgang Becker, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005) directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, *Rossini* (1997) directed by Helmut Dietl and *Im Juli* (2000) directed by Fatih Akin.

Anett Oertel, Office Staff of Goethe Institut asserted, "Until the 1990s German movies, which have a rich tradition, had little international recognition. These movies have won enormous popularity in Germany and elsewhere. These relatively new films opened up a new course of development and revealed a new path to the filmmakers in Germany. That's why we are showcasing these movies. This new era began through the endeavour of a good number of talented young filmmakers."

She added, "Through our different associate organisation in Bangladesh, we frequently organise movie screening sessions. Currently, the associate is Dhaka University Film Society."

Each day the organisers screen two movies. Of these *Wir Können Auch Anders* and *Lichter* have already been screened on September 5 at Goethe Institut Auditorium. Other films will be screened on September 13, 21 and 24.



Scenes from *Lichter* (L) and *Wir Können Auch Anders*

