

Musings with Syed Hasan Imam

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Freedom fighter and cultural personality Syed Hasan Imam began his acting career in 1961. Over the years, he has won several prestigious awards, including the Ekushey Padak (1999), Independence Award (2016) and Bangladesh National Film Award for Lifetime Achievement (2014), among others.

He never confined himself to one thing. At one point, he was a regular football and cricket player. He studied Mechanical Engineering, and got his first job was at Darshana Sugar Mill. He also worked at a bank.

Syed Hasan Imam began his acting career with television, before making his way into films. When he first started out, he worked on three different films around the same time. His first theatrical release was the film, *Dharapat*. He acted in several theatre plays as well. He has also shown his mettle as a film director, reciter and singer.

He took up Rabindra Sangeet in 1952, for a brief period. "I was the champion of the All India Youth Festival's Rabindra Sangeet category, and Chinmoy Chattopadhyay secured the second position," he says. "I was appreciated for my talent. However, I fell dangerously ill around that time and I had to give up my dreams of a singing career."

The actor also authored the book, *Akash Amar Bhorlo Aloy*, published by Panjeri Publications, in which he shared many personal stories. According to him, it is a lot like an autobiography.

Moreover, he was involved in the major political



Rafa



Bappa Mazumder



Kona

Pulling through as a musician

It was, perhaps inevitable for the music industry to see huge losses in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Since social gatherings can put one's well-being at risk right now, live shows have been cancelled, hindering the biggest source of income for musicians and putting their future in jeopardy.

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

"We are not doing well at all," says a concerned Bappa Mazumder. "You see, as much as we try to stay positive, I cannot help but think what will happen if three or four months go by like this." The artiste is trying to divert himself from reality as much as possible, spending more time in his home studio to make new music. "I am trying to learn visual editing, something that I've wanted to do for a while now. One thing that I am grateful for is being able to spend more time with my wife and daughter." Bappa asserted that even though innovations like online concerts on social media are helping, more needs to be done to keep musicians afloat.

Another star in the industry, Kona, says that anxiety is her bane during these times. "I can't explain the emotional roller-coaster I am on right now, as I keep scrolling through my news feed and am terrified of whatever is going on around the world," she says. The talented singer spends her time doing daily household tasks, barely able to concentrate on music. "I entered self-isolation with a sore throat. Moreover, it is very difficult for me to get myself to practice in this state of mind," says Kona, who believes that everything will be alright soon. "In spite of all the negativity, I believe that we will come through as a nation. Every now and then, when I see something positive on the internet, I pray that it is true," she says.

Positivity is the strongest weapon one can yield in the middle of a pandemic, according to Mahadi. The artiste, who is also the Head of Business in the retail chain Swapno, has taken



Minar

a huge step in helping out struggling musicians gain employment. "We were having constant meetings about the HR crisis and shortage of workers we were experiencing; so, I convinced the team to hire out-of-work session musicians. I am glad to say, they are doing very well." The commendable initiative, Mahadi's brainchild, is now providing food on the table for the families of some of the most neglected professionals in the country. "After the coronavirus hit, everyone was concerned about the day-to-day earners, and what will happen to them. However, no one thought of musicians who perform and earn on a daily basis, as music itself is unfortunately not considered a "real" profession in this country. I am happy that my organisation could do something for them."

Minar, who is now recording at his home studio, is skeptical of how

sustainable it would be to work from home as a musician. "During the Eid season, a lot of investment in music come in from the record labels. However, this time, there is little to no initiative," says the concerned artiste. "I had planned out 2020 meticulously, but the pandemic has poured cold water on all my plans. Musicians have gone into survival mode by now." However, the singer is utilising his time at home, concentrating on his artworks. "I am painting almost every day, and want to hold an exhibition of these paintings after this ordeal ends. No matter how cornered we are, I believe that we will find a way to get through this together."

Rafael Hasan Rafa has found his time in quarantine extremely productive. "I know that the lack of shows has been a nuisance, but I have used this time indoors to rediscover myself as an

artiste," says the AvoidRafa frontman, who feels like he had hit a musician's block for a while, before. The multi-instrumentalist noted that once a performer finds success, his work starts becoming formulaic. "For the last three or four years, I feel like I had been making the same kind of music with similar chords, which people have grown to associate with me. However, now, I have been experimenting with different types of sounds." Rafa explained that it is inevitable that online fests and shows will become the norms, if the situation stays the same. "Modern problems require modern solutions. We are already seeing initiatives like online-ticketed festivals for musicians. I am sure that we will find a way," he adds.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Mahadi



PHOTO: STAR

struggles of the country. "I have had a blessed life so far, with a range of experiences. I have been at the frontline during times of crisis. But now, even if I want to, my age restricts me to be so," says the freedom fighter. "I was involved in the movement that demanded trials for war criminals. Today, as the nation copes with the coronavirus crisis, despite my restrictions, I am trying my best to help people who are close to me and are struggling at this time."

Syed Hasan Imam was just eight in 1943, throughout the famine in the Bengal province of British India during the Second World War. "My family was actively providing necessary aid to the destitute families at the time, and I helped out as much as I could," he explains. "I remember the horrific days of the famine vividly. That was the first time I saw the realities of poverty and helplessness so closely. Those days taught me that we are all in this world to help each other out. I believe that our life is not for us, but rather, for the people around us. It is my greatest life lesson."

An avid bookworm, the actor is spending most of his time at home reading different books nowadays. "I am also keeping in touch with my friends and loved ones. It appears that we are at a standstill now, but life is going by," he explains.



Alif

Independent shorts by emerging filmmakers

PRACHETA AHANA ALAM

Today, film is arguably presented as a marketing tool rather than a form of art. An odd conundrum we see nowadays is films made in Bangladesh premiering internationally, but yet to see a theatrical release locally. Sameer Ahmed of Gao Productions once commented that filmmakers are often stuck in a circle of "agenda, corporate



W(dot): Be a Digital Superhero



The Shell

interests, TV channel guidelines", and it is only within these bounds that they are free to experiment.

That being said, a new generation of



Just a glance

independent filmmakers are emerging, and some of their content is free to consume online. The ubiquity of social media has made it so that there is an ocean of content online, but often it is easy for good content to become lost in the noise. Here is a list of five must-watch short films and music videos, in no particular order, that are a simple click away, and are worthy of attention.

INDALO'S 'HOBEDI'?

A music video with a hefty, suspenseful storyline and stunning visual effects, this short aligns perfectly with Indalo's eerie guitar riffs. The producer, Tawshif Akkas, supposedly worked with the director, Ejaz Mehedi, entirely from a different country and despite that, the attention to detail in its world-building is praiseworthy. It is available for viewing on the YouTube channel, Indalomusic.

THE SHELL

A spare, minimalistic horror short by Monzur Anik, with commendable attention to sound design and a simple but effective storyline. This short is available for viewing on the



Indalo's Hobedi?

YouTube channel, Filmesque.

W(DOT): BE A DIGITAL SUPERHERO

Winner of the Special Prize at Star-BracI's Short Film Competition in 2019, this short film was made with no budget, and follows the theme of 'Digital Bangladesh'. It's quirky, hilarious, and action-packed with very effective dialogue. It is available for viewing on Wasi Noor Azam's Vimeo channel.

JUST A GLANCE

A wonderfully introspective monologue by Ragheeb Faatih Moazzem, who goes by the alias 'Robindronath' online. This short manages to speak volumes without literally voicing a single word. It is available for viewing on Robindronath's IGTV.

ALIF

Jubo Zubayer Hossain's strong depicts a Kafkaesque tale with short social commentary. This surreal short has circled on numerous festivals, winning awards along the way. It is available for viewing on YouTube via the deafripENT channel.

'Tomar Prithibi Chinte Paro Na' instills hope for a better future

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

The coronavirus pandemic has essentially brought the world to a standstill, teaching us how we tend to take even the little things in life for granted.

A video featuring the poem, *Tomar Prithibi Chinte Paro Na*, written by Kamal Chowdhury and recited by Asaduzzaman Noor, was published by Voice of America recently via social media platforms.

Jointly backed by BCC, Ministry of Information and Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the video sends a message, urging people to stay at home for the time being to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

The poem portrays the harsh brutalities of the coronavirus pandemic, and how our world is struggling to fight the virus. Complementing the stellar composition by Naquib Khan and Bappa Mazumder, Noor's powerful voice inspires us to fight, while hoping for a better future. The poem was written to inspire millions of people, residing in their homes, to be hopeful and confident. Despite our helplessness and



Kamal Chowdhury

struggles against the virus, we will get through this.

With the lines, *Harbena Tumi Bijoyi Manush, Dekhbe Shudin Ashbe, Baire Abar Shobuj Patati, Jholmole Dine Hashbe*, the poem inspires us to fight back and make the world a better place by showing compassion.



Asaduzzaman Noor

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED