

“Productions are losing the real essence of our culture” —Salahuddin Lavlu

SHARMIN JOYA

Salahuddin Lavlu is a renowned actor, screenwriter and director. He reflects on urban social issues in his tele-fictions. In a recent conversation with *The Daily Star*, Lavlu, the President of Directors' Guild Bangladesh, shared his views on the present condition of the television industry and more.

This Eid season, television channels are running repeat telecasts of shows and some previously shot tele-fictions. “I hope that the audience enjoys the repeat telecasts. At the same time, it is unfortunate that the production teams of these shows will not benefit in any way from them,” says Lavlu.

Moreover, few production teams began shooting, putting their lives at risk during these critical times, despite the prohibition. “Frankly speaking, there was a lot of confusion surrounding this issue. When the government announced that they will allow a limited number of organisations to reopen after May 10, some thought that it applies for shootings. It was a misunderstanding,” asserts Lavlu. “As soon as the Directors' Guild learned about it, we immediately intervened and stopped the production teams. They have apologised as well.”

Majority of the critics and audiences feel that the television industry lacks creativity and innovation in storytelling these days, as writers and directors are mostly preoccupied with adaptations of foreign stories. Whereas, artists like Lavlu are dedicated to portraying our native culture and society. “Sadly, productions these days are losing the real essence of our culture,” he says. “I feel that the lack of knowledge and interest in our own culture is the reason behind the influx of foreign stories.” Only a handful of projects are made on contemporary issues that

represent the society of Bangladesh. Lavlu further shared that budgets for tele-fictions have decreased and at the same time, the role of the approval committee is on its way to extinction.

Most financiers are selective about scripts. They tamper with the stories to make them more budget-friendly, and even make decisions about casting. “Usually the programme departments of television channels have a preview committee who curate the projects. However, they don't maintain their roles anymore,” adds Lavlu.

According to him, the intervention of different agencies has disrupted the scenario, making way for a generation that is hungry for fame. He also feels that artists have lost respect over time, as art is being used for commercial purposes only. “Once upon a time, our tele-fictions were a part of our country's traditions. Even our neighbouring countries looked up to our productions,” he asserts.

Acting is the only profession for most artists. As a result, many agree to play repetitive roles on television, often for financial purposes. “A shopkeeper chooses the products that sell the most. But shouldn't there be a difference between a shopkeeper and an artist? An artist should understand their responsibilities towards their craft and their society,” explains Lavlu. As the President of Directors' Guild Bangladesh, Lavlu is aware of the misconducts in the world of television. The associations had planned to introduce some new policies, starting from this Eid season. However, due to the ongoing pandemic, they have put the implementation of those policies on hold. On a more optimistic note, the artiste hoped that moving forward, television channels will be more careful about the quality of the programmes they air.



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

Ferdousi Majumdar reminisces her days on 'Shongshoptok'

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Back in the day, BTV's *Bohubrihi*, *Kothao Keu Nei*, *Ei Shob Din Ratri* and *Shongshoptok*, brought families together under one roof, as they watched new episodes of the shows after days of waiting. As we grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, the channel added reruns of these iconic TV dramas to their schedule. Swept off by nostalgia, a large section of the nation's population has been happily watching the reruns on television at home, even though episodes of the shows are available on YouTube. *Shongshoptok*, based on Shahidullah Kaiser's novel, returned to BTV after three decades, from May 9. *The Daily Star* recently caught up with Ekushey Padak-winning actor Ferdousi Majumdar, who played Hurmotti in the hit series.

Why do you think 'Shongshoptok' was such a successful show?

I have been watching the show on BTV again, and I feel that the script, direction and acting were quite powerful at the time. We worked with great care and spent hours in rehearsals to develop the characters. In fact, everyone in the cast went through each line in the entire script. I believe that team work was the secret behind the success of the project. Abdullah Al Mamun also worked tirelessly as a director.

Hurmotti is one of the most iconic television characters in our country. How was your experience of playing the role?

Back then, everyone around me called me *Hurmotti*. Even today, most people recognise me because of the character. Playing her was one of the greatest achievements of my career.

What was it like to work with Humayun Faridee?

Humayun Faridee was an impeccable actor. Everyone on the sets, including myself, were

fascinated by his sheer aptitude. He was a true artiste, in every way.

You are one of the most powerful artistes in Bangladeshi theatre. How are you staying connected to your co-workers now?

Thanks to technology, I am staying in touch with my fellow theatre artistes through video calls, since we are all at home. They are like family to me, and we are trying to keep each other's spirits up.

Do you have any message for our readers in these turbulent times?

Nothing lasts forever. Even though we are going through difficult times, I believe that this ordeal will come to an end soon. Frontline fighters such as law enforcers and doctors deserve our heartfelt appreciation right now. They are risking their lives daily, and they do not deserve to be put in harm's way because of our negligence.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

JK Rowling announced she will publish a new children's book, a fairy tale about truth and the abuse of power. The *Harry Potter* author said she kept the book in her attic for years and will make it available online for free for children in self-isolation.

Set in an imaginary land unrelated to Rowling's other works, *The Ickabog* will be released in 34 daily, free installments before it is published as a book, e-book and audiobook in November. The royalties from the book will be distributed among projects fighting the pandemic.

The novelist said she wrote *The Ickabog* in fits and starts in between the Potter books well over a decade ago, and initially planned to publish it right after *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. However, she kept the book on hold, deciding to step away from children's books and wrote adult novels instead, including *The Casual Vacancy*, and *The Cuckoo's Calling* under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith. The first installment of the free online version of *The Ickabog* was released on May 26. Chapters of the book will be published daily until July 10 on *The Ickabog* website.



PHOTO: REUTERS

JK Rowling releases new children's book online for free

Preparing for a musical insurgence

How rising stars are handling quarantine

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Even though the ongoing pandemic has affected professional artistes the hardest, the rising stars in the music industry also face an uphill challenge, after musical events stopped altogether throughout the country. A vibrant sub-culture, which included café and art-space shows, university events and independent releases, have been submerged in uncertainty. Although the rising musicians of our industry usually do not financially depend on the art, their momentum – a crucial part in determining their trajectory – has been put in grave danger.

For many, the prospect of performing in an upcoming show worked as a motivator to create and practice. “Being quarantined isn't a good feeling,” says Razin Halim, Level Five's bassist. “Even though we have conference calls to discuss our future releases, it is hard to actually write new material at this time,

especially when most of us have to work from home as well.” Level Five, a popular indie band that came into the limelight with their debut album, *Obosheshey*, has consistently garnered fanfare with fantastic live performances. With the absence of shows, the members are doing the best they can to maintain the spark that brought them this far.

Artistes who had recorded material prior to the nationwide shutdown have an edge on the competition. Issa Nibras Farooque, known by his stage name Farooque Bhai, has seen substantial success with the release of his new EP, *Gin Bhoot Tonic*. “This is the only time I am on a level playing field as other Bangladeshi artistes,” says Farooque, who resides in Toronto, Canada. “Since everyone has to promote their music on the internet, all I have to do is focus on my own sound.” The Farooque Bhai Project's compositions have helped usher in a new age in Bangladeshi independent music, and the singer-songwriter does not



ILLUSTRATION: OISHIK JAWAD

plan on letting a virus halt his prowess.

Dads in the Park had shot the music video for their latest song, *Pareidolia*, prior to the shutdown. Much like *Lullaby*, their second single is also a resounding success. Even though the two-man project does not rely on shows as much, staying at home at a stretch does come with consequences. “For the past two months, I haven't been able to write anything,” says Ishmam Salim. “However, I had a few compositions written down from before, so I am working on those.”

Pragata Naoha, who was enjoying a remarkable run before the shutdown, tries not to let the events fluster her too much. Still riding the coattails of *Kalo*, the singer is already working on new material with her band, Hades. “All I can say is, I am looking forward to the release of our upcoming song, *Bedroom*. The listeners will be surprised if they can decipher the meaning behind it, especially during this unbearable period of having to stay at home,” she says.

Besides music, Pragata is also attending online classes for her first semester in the University of Manitoba.

“I am trying my best to stay positive and practice,” says Aseer Arman, who earned fame and accolades overtime with his song, *Eka Beche Thakte Shikho Priyo*. The former Joler Gaan member looks to start his studio work afresh, after things get better. “Due to some logistical difficulties, I unfortunately had to sell my studio equipment when I moved to another residence,” he says. “However, I am constantly jamming by myself, and trying to come up with new material. I plan to rebuild my studio as soon as I can.” If we know anything about our music industry – from both the spectrums of the famous and the rising – it is that the fraternity is spectacularly resilient in the face of adversities. The relatively small, but ever-growing fan base of the rising stars in Bangladesh, can hope that their favourite artistes will come out bigger, better and stronger.