

“I have had a lot to learn during this pandemic” – Munmun Ahmed

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Kathak exponent and celebrated television personality Munmun Ahmed has enthralled the audience with her grace and poise for decades. Honoured with accolades, including the National Award by Shishu Academy for Kathak Dance (1980), UNESCO Cultural Award (2000) and NHK Japan Award (2000), the danseuse is also an avid teacher and a splendid choreographer, who started her journey under the tutelage of the legendary Pandit Birju Maharaj in Delhi Kathak Kendra. *The Daily Star* catches up with the dancer, who is also the founder of Rewaz Performers’ School, a pioneering dance company in Bangladesh, to know about her recent activities.

How did you start planning your routine and activities when the pandemic hit the country?
When the coronavirus pandemic began, I didn’t think that it would last this long. I spent my time reading, watching movies, and doing household chores when we first went into isolation in March. However, for Pohela Boishakh, I felt like doing something for my fans. Subsequently, I uploaded my first online video. It was tremendously hectic and enjoyable at the same time. As we were stuck at home, we couldn’t get our costumes from outside and I was also not very competent with the technical skills required to make a video. It took us one whole night, and we were finally able to upload the video on Facebook the next morning. In the month of Ramadan, as a way of praying for everyone’s safety, I released a mystical piece on the Nazrul song, *He Khoba Doyamoy*, on World Dance Day, this year.

What are you currently busy with?
I have started an online show called *Nritter Nepotthe*, where we celebrate the journey of dancing legends hailing from Bangladesh. The show airs live from the official Facebook page of my dance academy, Rewaz Performers’ School, on Thursdays. We have already featured Amanul



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Haque, Golam Mostafa Khan, Sharmeen Husain, Azizul Islam, Minu Haque and Laila Hasan. We also invited Kajol Ibrahim and Dulal Talukdar. I am conducting online courses at my school and actively conducting classes at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. As for online workshops, I participated at the month-long free dance workshop organised by the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) as a Kathak dance trainer. Besides, I am planning to launch an online class in two categories, junior and senior, for dancers outside Dhaka.

Alongside being a dancer, you are also a successful entrepreneur. How are things looking for your restaurant?
My restaurant Munmun’s Kitchen is open for takeaways and online ordering. We are also working on our official contracts as per regular procedures, while maintaining safety measures. We have also ensured social distancing for the customers who come in for takeaways.

How has the pandemic affected you?
I have had a lot to learn during this pandemic. It has helped me to acknowledge my close peers and people who really care about my wellbeing. My niece, Avantika Alreja, has been very supportive and helpful during this time. My husband Sujit Mustafa helped me to record the videos. Without them, none of the work would have been possible. I wish to continue *Nritter Nepotthe*, and I am looking for sponsors, as there is a lot of work involved in the backend. I want to remunerate the people behind the show. I miss my daughter, Aporajita, who is pursuing her Master’s away from home. I hope to see her soon.



Renowned musicians and composers are now a part of BLCPS.

“We will not let Alauddin Ali and Andrew Kishore’s contributions go to waste”

– Hamin Ahmed on BLCPS

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Bangladesh Lyricist, Composers and Performers Society (BLCPS) was founded in 2014, as Bangladesh’s first proper CMO (Collective Management Organisation). The organisation recently started registration in order to protect artists’ intellectual property rights. *The Daily Star* caught up with founding member, legendary band Miles’ singer and guitarist Hamin Ahmed for more information.

Even though BLCPS was founded in 2014, it has recently started full-fledged registration. What was the reason for the delay?
There were many structural barriers that we had to overcome. We had to first complete a 27-month evaluation in accordance with international guidelines, as well as set up a good understanding with the ministry, copyright office and other authorities. I am happy to say that we are now enlisted by World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and International Confederation of Societies



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

of Authors and Composers (CISAC).

Due to the lack of structure in royalty disbursement, some people mislead artists for their own gain. How does BLCPS plan to face these challenges going forward?
At the moment, opportunists, who are mostly outsiders to the music and film

industries pose a huge threat to the industry. You are aware that most of the musicians and artists took a stand against such opportunists a few days ago. BLCPS is working day and night to create a proper structure, where we will collect royalties for artists from sources like

television, radio and even cafes, which make use of their intellectual property. We even have the legislation to call a task force if a creator is exploited. It might take time, but we are on the right path to root out any place for these miscreants to create confusion.

Is the aforementioned controversy a reason behind the renewed drive for BLCPS?
In part, yes. The recent passing of legends like Alauddin Ali and Andrew Kishore, who were devoted members and patrons of the organisation, also contributed to our emotional drive. We will not let their efforts go to waste. BLCPS is not owned by anyone – it is a community which serves to ensure artists their due.

Is registration for BLCPS open to everyone?
Any composer, lyricist or performing artist can join our organisation. We have already received amazing response from people all over the country. People from outside Dhaka are coming to register with us. We will keep working until we can set the tone for the rest of the entertainment industry to follow.

Stars join in to sing Arafat Mohsin’s ‘Shokale’



SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

As a part of Studio 58, Arafat Mohsin composed many beautiful songs throughout the years. The musician has recently released his single *Shokale*, a refreshing melody that has caught on to young music listeners. A video-mashup, made by celebrities who lip-synced to the song, is especially heart-warming—including the likes of Siam Ahmed, Sabila Nur, Pritom Hasan, Ridi Sheikh, Safa Kabir and Sunehra Binte Kamal. “I wrote, composed and played all the instruments in the song,” says Arafat. “I want to release at least one original song every month from now onwards.”



Young celebrities joined in to sing a mashup of ‘Konodin’.

The Umbrella Academy: Now is the best time to join the fandom

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

The market for superhero films, series and games had been somewhat oversaturated; as the few new creators who tried to enter it fell somewhat short of the mark. The Umbrella Academy, originally created as a comic book series by artist and My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way, was a surprise hit when its first season came to Netflix.

A surprisingly inspired set of characters are what differentiated the series in its original run. The plot is fantastically quirky – 43 infants are inexplicably born at the same time in the mid-20th century, with their mothers not being pregnant even a few minutes before their birth. Billionaire Reginald Hargreeves seeks and adopts 7 of these children, and trains them to be a family of superheroes. Hargreeves is a seemingly cold-hearted father, not even bothering to name the children, instead giving them numbers.

Without spoiling the story, I will just say that the first season of Umbrella Academy



The Umbrella Academy’s second season far surpasses its first.

was an energetic homage to what a superhero themed series should feel like, albeit held back somewhat by the tonal struggle of its own dour family drama. Season 2, however, eliminates all of that almost entirely, while

keeping the “impending apocalypse” theme and its near-fanatical violence.

The siblings – Luther, Diego, Klaus, Alison, 5 (He did not bother changing his name), Ben and Vanya, all have distinct superpowers,

some absurdly more powerful than the other. Luther, for instance, has super-strength, but the degree is somewhat punitive compared to 5, who can jump through space and time. Diego is adept at hand-to-hand combat, and can curve a knife to any trajectory, while Alison can ‘rumor’ anyone into doing anything she wants, including suicide.

What makes The Umbrella Academy work are not the superpowers themselves, but the dynamics between the characters. Klaus’ relationship with his deceased brother, Ben, transcends almost every action scene that the series throws at us, while Five, brilliantly played by Aidan Gallagher, steals the show time and time again as a 58 year old man trapped in a 13 year old’s body due to a botched time-travel attempt.

Ellen Page is the cornerstone of the show, as the seasoned actor redefines herself in the role of Vanya, her internal struggle with seemingly ‘non-existent’ powers and loneliness, culminating in a cataclysmic reaction that changes history forever. In the

second season, the creators brilliantly portray her tabooed relationship with Sissy Cooper, as well as the largely unlikeable Luther’s strong redemption arc.

Simply put, you start watching The Umbrella Academy for the superpowers, but stay for the characters. You get mindless violence and emotional tearjerkers, feeding off each other. Every other moment is iconic, largely helped by the intensely pleasing musical score. The villains throughout the series – Hazel, Cha-Cha, The Handler, The Swedes and the entire ‘commission’ – have motivations which are utterly believable, even amidst their cartoony demeanor.

While everyone else is calling it “The answer to X-Men”, I would label it as a question posed to all other superhero projects on cable TV – can it be outdone? I would predict The Umbrella Academy’s much-awaited third season to take on the likes of comic giants Marvel and DC, in terms of popularity.