

GRAPE VINE



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Ahmed risvy for Noble's 'Ovinoy'

Lyricist Ahmed Risvy once again came to the spotlight after writing the lyrics for Noble's new song, *Ovinoy*, which was given tune to by Ahmmed Humayun. Ahmed Risvy has written a lot of renowned songs over the years, including *Tumi Jodi Bolo* by Kumar Bishwajit and *Prithibir Sob Sukh* by Dolly Shantoni, among many others. Risvy said, "I have been writing lyrics for over twenty-five years now, and I have seen a lot of change in music throughout the years. With my lyrics, I have been trying to adapt to these changes."

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



Popular singer Sania Sultana Liza recently released a new song, *Bhabna*. Besides singing, the song's lyrics, tune and music composition is done by Hridoy Khan. Regarding the song Liza said, "*Bhabna* has a different feel to it. I believe the audience will appreciate the song. This is the first time I am working with Hridoy Khan. I really enjoyed working for the project." The song has been released on Hridoy Khan's official YouTube channel.



Jaya Filming During the Pandemic

Throughout her career, actor Jaya Ahsan has been seen playing the roles of many different kinds of characters. She has made each character unique and gained a lot of popularity in the process. Now, she will be seen playing a widow in the film *Nakshi Kathar Jamin*, which is being directed by Akram Khan. She started shooting for it on the 8th of November. She revealed that the film is being planned to release on the 16th of December, 2021 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's victory day. The film is based on the novel *Bidhobader Kotha*, by Hasan Azizul Haque. Aside from this, Jaya has also been shooting for an untitled film by Piplu R Khan since this September, which has already been completed.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

COVER STORY

JILL OF ALL TRADES

Versatile media personality and 'The Ekushey Padak' awardee Sara Zaker began her journey into the world of acting with 'Nagorik Natya Sampradaya' in 1973. After that, the actor took on several other roles which includes being an entrepreneur, director and counsellor. In this interview with Rafi Hossain, Sara Zaker talks about her life, theatre and her time during this pandemic.

Rafi Hossain: Welcome to *Uncensored* with Rafi Hossain. Today, we have with us actor, entrepreneur, director and counsellor, Sara Zaker. Thank you for being with us today.
Sara Zaker: Thank you for having me.

Rafi Hossain: I first want to say that I really love your name, 'Chixie'. Who gave you that name?
Sara Zaker: My mother actually gave me that name. It might sound modern and catchy, but at this age, I am not sure if it matches my personality. My mother wanted to name her first daughter Chinku, but since her first child was a son, she named him Chinku. That was my brother who we lost in the war of 1971. Later, she had another son, my brother, who was named Picho by my dada. He had a small nose and was named after Pinocchio, meaning that it would grow bigger if he lied. When I was born, as my mother had originally wanted to name me Chinku, she found a similar alternative, and named me Chixie. My close friends call me Chixie, and formally people refer to me as Sara.

Rafi Hossain: Some people find you intimidating. How do you feel about that?
Sara Zaker: While a little intimidation is needed in some situations, I generally feel upset when someone is scared of me. The colour of my eyes often makes people think that I'm angry, which is something I noticed even when I was young. People perceive me as rather closed-off, which I am not. However, it did give me a different personality and image.

Rafi Hossain: How did you get into acting?
Sara Zaker: Both my parents were supportive, and they never forced us to pursue any activity. My dad played a bigger role in me getting into acting, however. My elder brother was a big fanatic of movies, shows, and theatre. He even used to act in English at his university sometimes. He performed at the British Council stage, Bangladesh Mohila Samity stage and so on. He had big dreams about acting. I had an interest in acting, and this, perhaps, influenced me further. Additionally, I studied at an English Medium school and had a Western outlook. So, an uncle of mine told my dad to get me into Nagorik Natya Sampradaya to learn and participate in Bangla theatre as it would help me get more accustomed to the Bangla culture and language. That is how I got into acting. Aly Zaker had really inspired me as well.

Rafi Hossain: How did your relationship begin with Aly Zaker?
Sara Zaker: I believe he liked me first, and gave a proposal. I accepted his proposal after thinking things through, and I realised that it would also help me continue pursuing my acting. My father, however, did not accept the proposal readily. He met with him, and visited his house to see how he lived his life. But, in the end, it all worked out well.

Rafi Hossain: Could you share more about the Liberation War Museum that you founded?
Sara Zaker: I started as a founder and trustee. Since I was so emotionally attached to the history, it did not feel like something grand to me. Now, I'm the Secretary General, and I have more responsibilities. The team we have now are very efficient and the trustees are extremely supportive. Tariq bhai, who we lost, was also a trustee and helped tremendously during the foundation of the museum. People ask me how I am running so many establishments even during this pandemic and with personal struggles at home. However, I believe that without work, I would fall apart, as it gives me a sense of purpose.

Rafi Hossain: How did you get involved with the advertising agencies?
Sara Zaker: My husband had suggested it first. I had finished my masters, and was interested in working for a travel agency. He mentioned an advertising agency, but I disregarded it as frivolous. He then asked if I would join a research organization they had. I agreed to it as I was good at English, and I thought I would be able to write the reports well. However, I did not take into consideration that I neither had a statistics or economics background. That was perhaps one of the times I had to struggle and learn. I only went into communications after I had established the organisation strongly. This would be a brief history of my career.

Rafi Hossain: How did you balance everything in

your life?
Sara Zaker: I took advantage of the opportunities that came to me. I wish, however, that I had known I would pursue acting as a career and worked even harder when I was young, like my son Iresh does. Many individuals identify themselves as an actor, but I have taken part in many kinds of activities and sectors. I would say that I am a jack of all trades, but a master of none. However, I do not have any regret, as I did everything with devotion. I took part in a play, *Shot Manusher Khoje*, which was later televised. I had to make a decision back then as I had to choose between television, my studies, or my children. That is how I almost had twenty-five years of hiatus from acting on television. Later, when I went into television, I realised that I was confident, but the audience did not know me and so, did not accept me as well as the other actors. Acting in Humayun Ahmed's play later helped me gain more recognition.
Rafi Hossain: Your fans often say that you hold a strong position in theatre, rather than television. Why is that?
Sara Zaker: I am more associated with the theatre stage than television. I feel more confident and can hold the stage in theatre plays, but I don't feel the same when I'm doing a show for television. I believe that is because of the practice I have had, and my deep involvement with the theatre compared to television.



Rafi Hossain: Who would you say are co-actors that you feel comfortable working with?
Sara Zaker: I was always blessed to have great co-actors by my side. I always enjoyed working with Aly Zaker, Asaduzzaman Noor, Abul Hayat, Juboraj, Suborna and so on. They are all extremely talented actors. Similarly, when I worked alongside amateur actors, like in Catherine and Tareque Masud's movies, I had the luck to work alongside many new but skilled actors as well.

Rafi Hossain: How did you prevent your work from interfering or affecting your personal life?
Sara Zaker: I believe it was my upbringing. Growing up, we were not wealthy and often had to struggle financially. So, when our careers began to take-off, we valued the money we earned. We never took it for granted, and that is how we prevented the issue in our professional life from affecting our personal ones.

Rafi Hossain: What are your views on the state of the industry today?
Sara Zaker: There are many serious actors nowadays. However, in the show business, I believe that a lack of proper critiques and reviews is leading to the downfall of the industry as it is crucial in the

industry. We are losing audience from theatre and plays because of this as well.
Rafi Hossain: How do you feel about the new individuals in the industry?
Sara Zaker: Working in communications and in a multi-media platform has given me an insight into the changes that have been made recently. Despite our general view on the industry today, there are many new and talented individuals. I even downloaded *TikTok* and watch Youtubers and see influencers to understand how they work and what they aim to create. From there, I realised that many of them have fresh and unique ideas, and can connect with the audience. This world that is new and different to us must also be paid attention to if we want to create content today.

Rafi Hossain: Whose films, since the last decade, did you think were outstanding?
Sara Zaker: I really liked the films by Hridi Haq, Shuvashish, younger people like Haider and so on. I really like the directions they take. There are certainly many good films around. But, I think people don't focus on a lot of these individually because there is a lot of content in the market.

Rafi Hossain: Before the pandemic, did you regularly visit the theatre to watch new local films?
Sara Zaker: Yes, definitely. I used to go very frequently. Sometimes, I would even go alone because I really like watching new films, especially ones made by the youth of Bangladesh. This is why I have been very supportive of them as I think they don't get enough support from the general public.

Rafi Hossain: Can you name some younger actors and actresses that you think have a lot of potential in the film industry?
Sara Zaker: I can't think of many names right now but a few people that come to mind are people like Haider, Jaya and Abrar who I believe take their work very seriously.

Rafi Hossain: What are your thoughts on the type of content we find online, now that people are more gravitated towards these due to the pandemic?
Sara Zaker: I feel that video content is the most popular compared to written and other types of content, especially on platforms like Facebook and TikTok.

Rafi Hossain: How important do you think it is to grasp the attention of viewers in the least amount of time possible?
Sara Zaker: It is definitely very important. We always see how articles and videos with interesting headlines and buzzwords get the most attention. People think that there will be something to learn from by clicking on those. In my personal experience I have noticed some interviewers ask very personal questions in order to extract more information.

Rafi Hossain: Do you think this is an appropriate practice for hosts? And do you think all viewers would willingly watch such interviews?
Sara Zaker: No, I don't think every viewer would want to watch these. And it is rather inappropriate for hosts, especially since the media usually focuses on the personal lives of younger female celebrities before thinking as these comments can often come off as degrading.

Rafi Hossain: Do you think this encourages people to behave more misogynistically, especially considering the rising rape cases in Bangladesh? How do you think we should speak out against rape culture?
Sara Zaker: I believe that some men use rape or encourage rape culture on social media as a show of power, in order to silence an entire sex. It is almost as if they are trying to start a war within the country against women by shifting the blame to them. Many of these men get off the hook too easily. There should be appropriate laws established against such actions and we should certainly show a zero-tolerance policy towards it. While we cannot make such huge changes overnight, I do believe if enough people spoke out unanimously, we could make these changes much faster.

Rafi Hossain: Thank you for being with us today. It was a pleasure talking to you.
Sara Zaker: Thank you for having me.

Shreya Shomoyeeta

POPCORN HIGHLIGHTS

Here are some binge worthy movie and series you can spend your time watching while you stay at home social distancing, keeping yourself, as well as others, safe.

DASH & LILY

Dash & Lily is a rom-com TV series on Netflix, first aired on November 10, 2020. It was created by Joe Tracz, produced by Karl Frankfield under the banners of 21 Laps Entertainment, *Boy Detective Inc.* and *Image 32*, and stars Austin Abrams, Midori Francis and Dante Brown, among others. The storyline, which is based on *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares* by Rachel Cohn & David Levithan, follows the unexpected romance between polar opposites Dash and Lily, as they trade notebooks all across New York City.



Dracula Sir

Dracula Sir is a Bangla horror-thriller film, following the life of a teacher with prominent canines, who discovers that he has stark resemblances with Count Dracula. It was written and directed by Debaloy Bhattacharya and Kallol Lahiri, produced by Shrikant Mohata and Mahendra Soni under the banner of *Shree Venkatesh Films*, and stars Anirban Bhattacharya, Mimi Chakraborty and Bidipta Chakraborty, among others. The film was released on October 21, 2020 in theatres.



A TEACHER



A Teacher is a drama series, created by Hannah Fidell, who also directed the show along with Gillian Robespierre and Andrew Neel, produced under the banners of *Aggregate Films*, *Hola Fidel* and *EXP*, distributed by 20th Television, and stars Kate Mara, Nick Robinson and Ashley Zukerman, among others. The plot, which is based on the eponymous film, follows the illicit relationship between a young teacher at a high school and her student. It was aired on November 10, 2020 on FX on Hulu.

Amina Hossain