Kishore Lives with Kumar Shanu

ROM a small time crooner on the Calcutta stage to the country's highest paid playback singer in Bombay, Kumar Shanu has come a long way. In fact, this 32-year-old Bengali youth can well be regarded as having come up with no claims to originality, but purely on the strength of being a good copy cat!

Today, nobody can deny that Kumar Shanu is the most authentic sound-alike around of Kishore Kumar - and a successful one at that.

What exactly has worked in his favour? Was it Mahesh Bhatt's 'Aashiqui' in 1990 that became a turning point in his career? Or was it changing his name from Shanu Bhattacharya that made all the difference?

The singer himself speaks of this amazing success story in the following interview:

Does the name Kumar Shanu have anything to do with your singing like Kishore Kumar?

Yes and no. For I did not assume the name; it was given to me by (music composers) Kalyanji-Anandji when I cut my first Hindi film disc for 'Jaadugar' with them. I guess they felt that Shanu Bhattacharya would be closely associated with a Bengali and could be detrimental to my career. So they came up with this name (Kumar Shanu) which cannot be related to any linguistic group or, for that matter, any community. Fortunately it worked.

Now, as far as my singing like Kishore Kumar is concerned, I have never felt ashamed about it. I take it as a compliment, though I must admit I can be no patch on him, regardless of whatever name I call myself by. He was a legend whom nobody, just nobody, can get close

Since when did you decide to copy Kishore?

I have never made a conscious effort to do it. It is sheer coincidence that when I broke into the Bombay music scene, Kishore Kumar had just passed away and people found some similarity in our voices. But stylistically we are poles apart, and I can dare not pretend to be another Kishore. He was our pride, a symbol of our musical heritage. How can I compare myself with him?

But then, I must admit I do try to follow him, which is not the same as imitating him. For that matter, Kishore himself tried to follow K L Saigal and Lata Mangeshkar too had admitted to following Noor Jehan. But can we accuse Kishore and Lata of being copy cats? That is not

I suppose your first hit was a Bengali album Amar Shilpi Kishore Kumar". What were you doing before that?

Well, music runs in our family. My father was music director of a jatra (folk theatre) party in Bengal. For all practical purposes, he has been my music guru and still is. But it did not take me long to realise that there is not much of a prospect

VERY day a bit of Iraqi

history crumbles away.

A fragment of a Sume-

rian tablet is lost forever.

ancient mounds are inundated

by artificial lakes and priceless

artifacts erode into scrub; time

and the perils of the Gulf war

are taking their toll on 6,000

years of Mesopotamian civilisa-

to lrag's heritage comes from

the continuation of interna-

historical sites of Mesopotamia

- the land between the rivers

Tigris and Euphrates - have

not been getting the care they

aid, through UN offices, is ur-

gently needed to preserve

some of the more famous

landmarks and keep the dis-

covered treasures safe for

says Dr. Mauyad Sa'eed, Direc-

tor General of Irag's antiquities

"We have to move quickly,"

Officials say international

need for their preservation.

tional sanctions.

posterity.

One of the greatest threats

For more than a year, the

by Tapan Panda



Kumar Shanu

in following in his footsteps. So I enrolled in a Calcutta college with the intention of doing B Com and eventually settling down as an accountant. At that time also, I kept up my music training and used to sing in college functions.

Then why did you decide to leave Calcutta and move to Bombay?

I have some personal reasons, but I'll still explain. Well, Calcutta as a city is not bad, but had I stayed there, I am sure I could never have established myself as an artiste. I might not have been allowed to come up. I'll explain.

Last year there was a big show held at Bakreshwar, a Calcutta suburb, for the purpose of collecting funds to help in the rehabilitation of villagers who were unsettled by a hydel project. Most playback singers from Bombay were invited to it and they went and participated in the event, and were richly paid for it.

Now for some unknown reason, I did not receive any invitation. In my place, a young man went up on the stage and before a gathering of about one and a quarter lakh people, he sang all my hit numbers. Not one person in the gathering asked why the original artiste had not been called. The organisers too did not bother to explain, whereas at one time, they used to invite me and make me sing night after night — for free.

You seem to be quite upset about it? Not upset, but sad. What hurt me was the attitude of some and their negative approach

Do you miss performing for your home audiences on stage?

On the other hand... Not really. In the first place, I do not have the time to go to Calcutta often for stage shows at this point of my career. Bombay cinema keeps me quite occupied.

Secondly, I do not much fancy stage shows, whether in Calcutta, Bombay or elsewhere. In fact, I have been regularly refusing offers to perform abroad, except when they are for a worthwhile cause. This is because you need a different kind of approach to perform before a live audience from what one normally does in a studio recording. You are expected to be loud, flashy, raise your voice all the while and be chatty with the audience... It can be quite strenuous and I do not think ! can be up to it.

Is it because you are not fluent in

Hindi? That is not the point. In an organised stage show, there are ways to get over a language handicap, because ultimately, it is to see how you sing that people come. My problem is that I am not cut out for the kind of demands showbiz places on say a rock star or even a film star. You need a certain kind of sensibility for that kind of image. You are expected to perform. Now, in my scheme of things, believe I am just an artiste.

But are you not distancing yourself from the public this way?

I do not think so. Of course, while performing on stage, one is able to strike an instant rapport with the audience. That kind of interaction is very crucial for an artiste to grow. But then, look at it an other way: while performing on stage, can reach out to a few hundred, or perhaps a few thousand at any given time. But a cassette recorded in a studio can reach out to millions all over the world right round the year. The mileage one gets from that singular effort is much more than a stage show.

In the final analysis, I believe that it is how well you sing that matters most. People will listen to you so long as you have that special quality in your voice. And I do not think I have lost out much by not being a stage performer, if the fan mail I receive every day is any indication.

What about your film commitments? I haven't been able to keep a count o the number of films I have on hand. All that I know is that I have to leave home before eight in the morning every day and return from the studios after midnight. It can be quite strenuous and exhausting, but I quite enjoy being busy this way. On an average, I am recording four or five songs every day. On one day in January I recorded 13 songs during a space of 20 hours. But that was an exceptional situa-

Apart from singing, what do you enjoy

I love eating. On days when the studios are closed, I do nothing but eat and eat at home. I like good food and keep experimenting with new dishes and recipes. Apart from this, I enjoy travelling a lot. If there is a place I have fallen in love with, it is London. It is my idea of a fun city. But then, nothing can quite match my obsession for music. It is my life blood. It is what I live for.

Mr Panda is a freelance writer in Bombay.

Puppetry Opens Children's Eyes to Folk Arts

T HILE their peers in many developed coun-V tries are hooked on television and computer games, children in Kamaladevi Bhavan, New Delhi are discovering traditional Indian theatre.

The children are exposed to a wide range of traditional crafts such as puppet-making and manipulation, stitching of costumes and even the staging of puppet plays. They learn to play ethnic musical instruments, sing folk songs and perform folk dances.

They are part of a project using traditional art as an educational tool, the brainchild of the late Smt Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, founder and chairwoman of Srinivas Malliah Memorial (SMM) Theatre Crafts Museum in New Delhi.

It was her response to a problem aired during the Magsaysay Awardees Assembly meeting convened in 1987 by the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation, the Asian counterpart of the Nobel Prize. It was noted in the meeting that "Asian civilisations are traumatised by the spread of modern urban consumption patterns and by the increasingly pervasive role of mass media in cities and

Exposing children to traditional crafts, thought Ms Chattopadhyay, would open their eyes to the beauty of such crafts and their creation, and lead to a deeper appreciation of the arts.

Ms Chattopadhyay died before the project could take off, but it was not the end her vision. Before she passed away, she managed to lay the groundwork for the project with a proposal which was submitted to the Ramo Magsaysay Foundation for possible funding.

Without waiting for the grant, Ms Chattopadhyay also went ahead and conducted an experimental workshop for children to test how the project would work.

The experimental workshop on puppet-making and manipulation was held in June 1988, involving 15 children mostly from urban areas in Delhi. The children capped the workshop by mounting an exhibit of the different types of puppets they created. These

less Mesopotamian artifacts.

Worst hit are tens of thou-

"The writing in these an-

sands of undeciphered cunei-

form tablets, now kept in

unscientific conditions that

cient mud leaves amounts to

more than 50 books, each with

250 pages each. Their loss will

be damaging to Mesopotamian

and Near Eastern history," he

are even considering reburying

the tablets and many other en-

dangered artifacts and leaving

them underground until che-

mical substances used in their

in the south and Kurds in the

north in the aftermath of the

war, 7 or 14 museums were

almost completely looted and

Mesopotamia lost at least

helped foreign archaeological

teams by paying some of their

excavation expenses. Sa'eed

says he contacted several aca-

demic institutions with an in-

terest in Mesopotamian dis-

covery to help in saving Iraq's

heritage, but with no success.

Before the Gulf war, Iraq

During uprisings by Shi'ites

treatment are allowed in.

4,000 precious artifacts.

Some Iraq Museum experts

will cause them to decay.

Lita Consignado-Lee writes from Manila

Handcrafted puppets vs electronic toys and games? The choice is clear for these Delhi children who, through a puppetry workshop, learn to appreciate the traditional arts — and to create

were then used as characters in a much-applauded play the children themselves helped

Upon her death, and with a grant of US\$9,560 from the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation, the SMM Theatre Crafts Trust decided to continue the work Ms Chattopadhyay started. When the project started in December 1989, children from different urban schools were asked to take part in the workshops.

Many parents, however, showed little interest. To generate enthusiasm, the Trust thought of making the children of puppeteer parents the first beneficiaries of the pro-

gramme. The leaders of the Puppeteers JJ Colony situated near the Shandipur Depot in New Delhi readily volunteered their children.

The Colony is made up of some 500 families of puppeteers, musicians, singers, magicians, balladeers and jugglers who refer to themselves as Bhules Bisre Kalakaars or "forgotten artists and craftspeople".

Descended from backward casts and tribes, they migrated to Delhi about 20 years ago in search of livelihood. Through the years they have become highly skilled in traditional crafts and the performing arts. It was among them that Ms

abling them to have their first permanent homes. Over a year old, the SMM project has been moving smoothly. There is now no slack in demand for admission

> a popular call to expand the programme which is currently handled by two teachers from the Puppeteers Colony. The young participates, instructors report, learn quickly and show confidence not observed in other children. Project leaders are working to enhance the programme and

to the workshops, and there is

Chattopadhyay organised In-

dia's first cooperative for folk

artists - the Bhula Bisre

Kalakaars Industrial Coopera-

tive Society. With her persua-

sion, the Ministry of Housing

and Development constructed

cooperative housing right

where they had camped, en-

young people. Not for nothing is Ms Chattopadhyay called "Mother of Arts and Crafts."

bring its benefits to more

- Depthnews Asia

Tina Brown Puts on the (Red) Boxing Gloves Again for a New Challenge

EW YORK: Wearing a sleek cream suit and a thick strand of pearls, Tina Brown sat demurely at the marble conference table in her office at Vanity Fair. the hottest magazine in the country.

But a pair of red boxing gloves, originally owned by Marvin Hagler and a gift from photographer Annie Leibovitz, hung on a hook behind her. They hinted that the British-born Brown, with her anchorwomen looks and designer wardrobe, was not just another chic editor floating through the halls of Conde Nast.

The news that Brown will become the first woman, and only the forth person, to edit the venerable New Yorker magazine resounded through Manhattan recently like a shot from a cannon. One New Yorker staffer began crying on the phone and proclaimed it "the end of the magazine."

But the day after the announcement, Brown, 38, maintained a steely composure.

She called her revitalisation of Vanity Fair a "long tough struggle" and seemed poised for another fight: bringing the elegant, writerly New Yorker to those weaned on television's quick cuts and sound bites. "I'm excited. I'm full of anticipation," she

said, surrounded by framed portraits of all her Vanity Fair covers hanging on the walls. "I never thought about this. I could never imagine the process by which it could happen. I thought the third editor would be there another 25 years."

The process was simple, at least on paper. S I Newhouse Jr, chairman of both advance Publications and The Conde Nast Publications, which publish the New Yorker and Vanity Fair. said that Robert Gottlieb, New Yorker editor since 1987, was leaving because of philosophical differences about the "evolution" of the

Gottlieb was president of the book publisher Alfred A Knopf before he came to the New Yorker. He succeeded the legendary William Shawn, the beloved editor for 35 years. Harold Ross founded the literary and journalistic weekly in 1925. "Unless I'm totally inept, I should be able to

keep the high standards of the New Yorker," Brown said, mindful of the fear sweeping the publishing industry that her new appointment spells the end of an era. Brown said she intends to remain true to

the "text-driven" literary tradition at the New Yorker and will keep the cartoon covers, but may add photographs. "I've been offered the New Yorker because I

made a success of Vanity Fair," she said. "I know it's a totally different product. It's vital to preserve its integrity, its pristine approach to Brown said she wants to introduce the New

Yorker to a "new generation" of readers by offering them prose as electric as Vanity Fair's splashy spreads on celebrities and pop culture. But will the television generation buy tt?

"It may be hard, but that's the challenge. that's the attraction," Brown said. "I'm enormously determined about seeing through my vision. I have always been able to see what I want very clearly." Will she miss running what Madison Avenue

calls a "hot book?"

"It's a different kind of heat," said Brown of the plans for the New Yorker. "It doesn't have to be Demi Moore (naked and pregnant on the cover) to be hot. Vanity Fair was a daring visual experiment. But there are different ways to push the envelope." Brown has thrived on challenges as far back

as she can remember, and she has never lacked determination. She was an award-winning journalist for Punch and New Statesman in London and editor of The Tatler magazine. She was barely 30 when she took control of Vanity Fair, increasing its circulation from 260,000 to about 1 million. "I've always been somebody who's thrived on

pressure," she said. "I'm actually quite a shy person, but once I see a challenge I can be very Part of the Brown lore is the story about

how she camped outside the office of her future husband, Haroled Evans, when he was editor of the London Sunday Times, watting to see him about a lob. "He kept me waiting for two days," Brown

said, smiling at the memory. "He still keeps me waiting."

Evans is now publisher of Random House. He and Brown have a 6-year-old son and a 22month-old daughter.

Brown said Evans was "thrilled" to hear about her new post.

"He knows a whole side of me was not being used at Vanity Fair," said Brown, echoing friends and colleagues who say she's more bookish and intellectual than the magazine she made famous.

"I've wanted to move to a more serious arena. Vanity Fair has been so exciting, but there's a limit to what I can do here," she said. "Being on a monthly has sometimes frustrated

But Brown cried when she told her staff she was leaving.

"They haven't ever seen me cry - it was the first and last time they ever will," she said ruefully. "Vantty Fatr has been a golden period in my life. It was my honeymoon in America. The staff was like my family, my creative famtly. It will be hard to better."

Brown said she's sure she will love her new job and said any wary staffers at the New Yoker "may be pleasantly surprised."

Her only worries concern her children, an issue that the three previous editors of the New Yorker presumably did not face.

"It's hard. It's my only anxiety," she said. "I didn't have children when I first came to Vanity Fair, and now I have to find a way to successfully edit the New Yorker without draining myself as a mother. You try to balance

it out, but it's hard."

enlightenment.

- UNB/AP

the care they need for their preservation. The Gulf war and UN sanctions have also taken their toll on the Iraq

largest and richest in department, which safeguards Mesopotamia's most valuable the world. monuments and excavates ancient sites. "Conservation work is continuous work. It's like the medical check-up of an old

man." The Department has under its jurisdiction about 5,000 individual buildings and more than 1,500 protected ancient

renowned. These range from the southern Mesopotamian sites of Babylon and Ur, which date from 2500 BC, to the imposing 10th century structures of the Abbsid Caliphate in Baghdad.

sites, some of which are world

Others include popular tourist spots such as Mosul's 13th century leaning minarets. the magnificent 18th century Turkish-style houses of the oilrich city of Kirkuk and the fascinating wood-carved Shanashil (verandahs) of Basra.

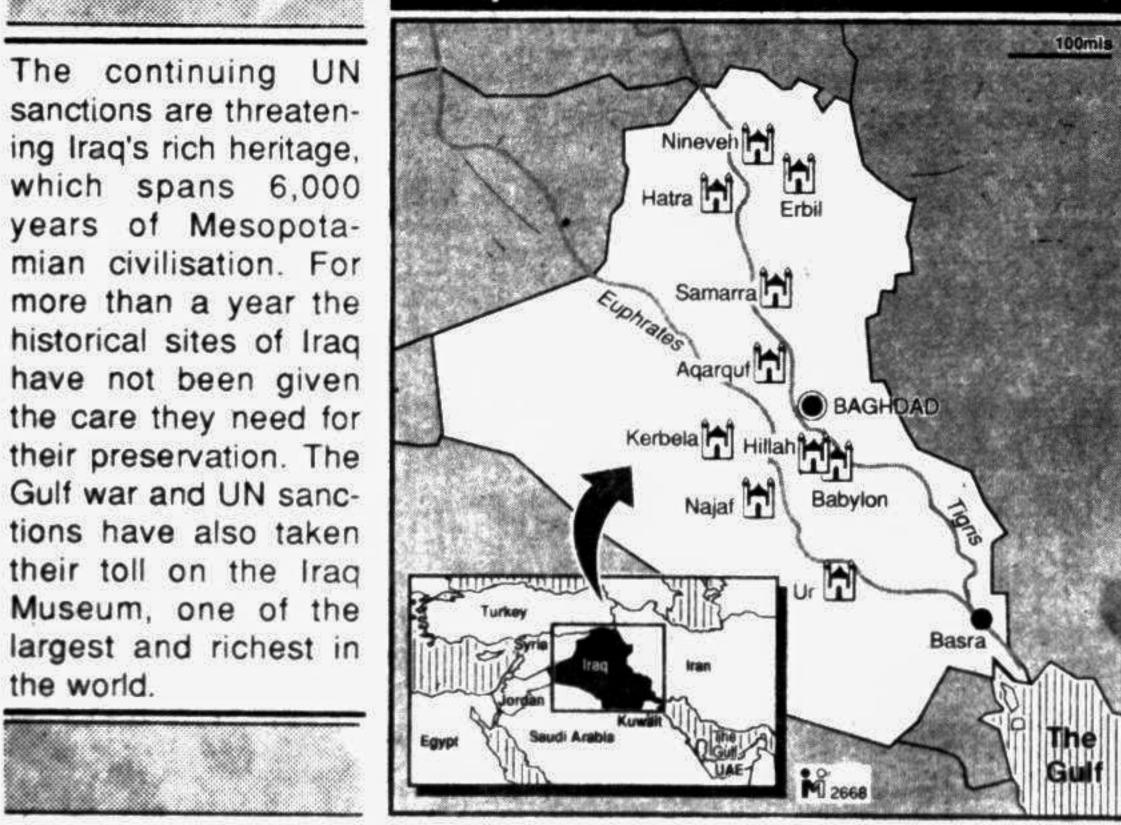
A similar number of lesser monuments are protected and maintained by provincial authorities, but Iraq has so much history that ancient sites. tombs and buildings are sometimes allowed to decay, or are left forgotten.

Visitors to Ashur, Assyria's religious metropolis 300 kilometres north of Baghdad, can now only see half-reconstructed, crumbling monuments covered with nylon sheets to protect them from the carth-dissolving rain and

A brick factory, imported during the mid-1980s, to produce 10 million bricks for the reconstruction of the temple Iraq: historical sites

Rich Heritage Destroyed by Poor Politics

Leon Barkho writes from Baghdad



of Ishtar, is out of order and Sa'eed says the half-completed the Gulf war and sanctions. sanctuary will soon turn to

ruins again Officials are now considering preventing visitors from entering the exquisite monument of ancient Mosul, one of the Middle East's best preserved 13th century towns.

Plans to save two ancient mausoleums, regarded by his torians as gems of Islamic ar chitecture, had to be shelved and the sacred tombs are in danger of collapse.

Visitors can no longer enter the shrine of Imam Yahya as the widening cracks in its or nate gypsum built dome threa ten the 25-metre-high structure with collapse at any time.

Also at risk, according to recent reports, are 300 ancient burial mounds, some dating back to 8,000 BC, situated in the basins of rivers on which the government has constructed huge dams The artificial lakes are be-

ing filled up with water and scores of mounds are being lost forever," says Sa eed. "Some of the inundated

mounds belong to little-known periods and their excavation would have thrown new light on Mesopotamia's long his-

The Iraq Museum, one of the largest and richest in the world, is suffering as much as

the rest of the country from

Before the war started, the 150,000 artifacts of the museum were transferred outside Baghdad for safety, but more than a year after the war, its shelves are empty with the treasures still in their trunks.

"We need air conditioner spare parts, cleaners and foreign expertise to help in rearranging the artifacts again." Sa'eed says.

The Director of the Iraq Museum, Dr Sabah al-Shukri, says his laboratories have run out of the substances used to treat and preserve the price

"I just cannot understand why they meddle politics with culture and heritage," he says. "Mesopotamian civilisation belongs to the world at large. It's part of the heritage of the hu-- GEMINI NEWS man race."

LEON BARKHO is an Assistant Professor at the University of Mosul in Irag.

Dare One Indulge in a Respite!

Continued from page 8 Again, important and necessary messages have to be sent overseas as one must catch up with one's correspondence. And what better time is there than when one has the excuse of being ill?

Yet, when the surgeon further advises one a complete bed rest for a month, one can hardly sleep a wink. "I wish I could be buried", I confide to our cook in the kitchen. "It's not that so easy," she soothes me with her gentle votce. How, then would I dare to malinger, which would thrill my heart to bits !



FEELINGS Julian Francis

The birds know where they are going Do 1? The water rushes along

But do 1? I long for the company of friends I have

But without them, will 1?

And hope, unlike me, they don't feel bereft My love and my hopes are with them all

the time And with their very great strength they'll do just fine

Never before have I felt go alone I long for their places I can call my home I need their frustrations, their laughter, their pain

For without all that I'll not feel the game Or will I? I worked with them, I cried with them

But never did I lie with them And together we lit a fire in the rain So strong it will never go out again They're going to build a world anew To educate some, and bring hope to a few

A Higher Summit

Hubert Francis Sarkar

Accursed as I had been, I saw the doomsday It had been too precocious, too early

When they used to play, when they used

arrogant words, when a grave-mine is

I read the decay, the distillusionment I felt that I have been swept away from childhood memories. That I had been once a humble student.

I shouted out, I wanted to show them a Kris I saw the doomsday, Now I talk of eternal

Now I am a bit different, Now I have gone a transformation. I am no more a mere living being. I an not after any grandiose toy. Yet, I feel the elation.

Doomsdays are nothing to obliterate it. Our risorgimento has reached a higher summit.