

...Artcell...Black...Cryptic Fate...

By Chowdhury Rashaam Raiyan

Note: Shaju-drummer (Artcell), Jahan-guitarist (Black) and Shakib-vocalist (Cryptic Fate) are the one's answering on behalf of their bands, but in some cases the views expressed are more personal, rather than the 'over-all' perspective of their respective bands...How's life?

Shaju(Artcell): Having the best time of my life! Just graduated...and leading a BEKAR life...ha ha ha!

Jahan (Black): On the run, chasing dreams. Desperately need some NOS for my engine!

Shakib(Cryptic Fate [CF]): Life is great. I've got a job in an advertising firm and in my spare time I play cricket, do music and hang out with friends.

Benson and Hedges has been an integral part of the spread of 'band music' in Bangladesh from the

be worth his remuneration #4 His own satisfaction as a musician (never fulfilled) and #5 his contribution to Bangla music (a very few think of it).

And for an UnGr musician priority #1 is- doing good music...smartly and getting recognized #2 His own satisfaction #3 Proving himself to friends, family, a number of audiences and to himself too #4 Contributing something to Bangla music and taking music as a career. That explains it all but opinions may vary.

CF: Mainstream musicians support themselves with their music. That is their job, they make a living from music. Thus they always have to make music, which they think will sell. They cater to popular trends. Underground musicians do music as a hobby, so they have the freedom to create the kind of music that they want to listen to.

CF: It all started in the 70s with Azam Khan and really this is a HUGE topic. Bands like LRB, Miles, Feedback were all "underground" in the beginning and created fantastic music. But then they all went commercial. UnGr music resurfaced in late 80s and early 90s with bands like Rockstrata and Warfaze. There was another resurgence in the late 90s with Dethrow, Psychodeth, Koprohilia, and of course my own band Cryptic Fate. My personal experience is that the best time to be an underground band is now, because of the enormous support from people like Sumon Bhai, Duray Bhai and Khaled bhai of G-series (cassette production company). Plus, we have great studios now that we didn't have 5 years back. As for my personal experience, it's been tough and frustrating for a long time but the last 2 years have been

socio-economic backgrounds, and thus, cannot produce music for the 'masses' in Bangladesh, where over 40% of the people live below the poverty line. Is this the reason for the successful UnGr musicians to remain UnGr or at a maximum stay popular at a more urban level but not at a rural one?

I think the whole band music is targeted to Urban, semi-urban level. It's not for rural people anyway. So I think we are not intended to produce music for the 'masses'. And the type of music we the UnGr musicians are doing, are not even for all the band music listeners. So it is very unlikely for us to be a big hit in the market.

Black: To enjoy the music we produce, the listener must have a listening background. One can't jump from pure, raw folk to heavily sounded prog rock or alt rock



late 90s and have sponsored various 'youngster' hangouts. What are your feelings about this not only as musicians in Bangladesh but also as icons that young people look up to?

Artcell: Obviously B&H is doing a great job with the 'Youngster' hangouts. But I'm not quite sure about their contribution to the music scene. Maybe it's because I'm a latecomer in the music scenario. All I saw from them is the 'Star Search' thing. And quite frankly I don't see any real 'Star' coming out from there. Where are Vikings and Stealers now? Has B&H backed them up much? There should have been a lot of concerts organized by them featuring their "Stars". You started the process now finish it properly! Well, than again it's just my personal point of view. I may not know some things and that's probably why I'm looking at this from a different angle.

Black: Unlike any other sponsors, they have succeeded in setting a standard in sponsoring musical events or public hangouts, which are surely worth enjoying. Whatever they do, they do it bigger and better. But it's a pity that all of their events are planned only for their age restricted target market (above 18 years of age). I support their initiative, which promotes art, music and fashion but I definitely do not support the product they are selling.

CF: The entire B&H contest and everything is a great platform for young musicians. It is the only formal event that recognizes band music and lets young people from all over the country realize their dreams. As in any event in Bangladesh, there are both good and bad things associated with it but on the whole I am all for the B&H Star Search (even though I failed in it twice, once with Cryptic Fate and the next time with Watson Brothers).

Different 'aspects' attract people to music, what is it for each of you?

Artcell: I don't know about others, but for me it's the thrill of playing LIVE in front an audience, who are enjoying and appreciating the music, head banging etc. I used to see Metallica, Pantera live concerts and just dreamt of playing on stage like them!

Black: Never thought of it...none of our parents relate to this, so can't say it's by birth either...lets say...it just...happened...naturally!

CF: Playing music was a rush. That's what attracted us at first. But soon we realized that making our own music was even more of a rush and that's what kept the attraction alive for so many years. Another reason is that we believe we are damn good at doing music and we want to be remembered long after we're dead as significant contributors to Bangla Rock.

What is the main difference between mainstream and underground (UnGr) musicians?

Black: For a mainstream musician priority #1 is his music director's satisfaction #2 How the listeners will respond to it ("khabe ki khabe na?") #3 Whether it will

We know very little about the emergence of the UnGr music scene in Bangladesh...Can you tell us how it started...and your personal experiences in it?

Artcell: I know about this underground scene from '97, '98. At that time PG auditorium was holding a series of underground metal shows quite regularly. Sometimes 3/4 concerts a month! At that time most bands were Heavy metal bands. There were bands like Cryptic Fate, Koprohilia, Dethrow, Psychodeth, X-uranium, Tantrik, Clovermind and many others. They mostly covered songs from Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, Pantera, Sepultura, and these sorts of metal bands. There was not much of Alternative rock. Only pure heavy stuffs. (I even remember in one concert a band named "Spanking Monkeys" covered Smells like Teen Spirit, and some other alternative songs, and we were like, "What the...?" We didn't pay this much to see these!) No hard feelings to anyone, but the scene was like this at that time. But those golden times didn't last for long, as PG refuses to hold any more shows as they ended up with broken chairs after every show. After the scene had a break, as there were shortage of venues.

Meanwhile, I got inspired by all those shows, 'cause I listened to metal all my life, but had no idea about people covering them here in Dhaka city! With that inspiration I started to learn drums and got fortunate enough to work with my current band mates. But that's a totally different story, the formation of the band Artcell. Well after Artcell was born we had our first show in ICMA auditorium in Katabon. We covered Unforgiven 2 and one song from Garage inc. (can't remember the name) of Metallica and Inner Self and Propaganda from Sepultura. Well that's our start in the underground scene.

amazing and as I have already mentioned, this is a good time to be an underground band!

Inspiration, Originality, and Copying...Bangladeshi music has always taken from western music (like the great Tagore himself) and it has been a source of enriching our creativity over the years, so why is it that now, when something remotely resembles western stuff...it comes under intense scrutiny from all sides?

Artcell: I've noticed that, nowadays, some people have this weird tendency of always trying to find from where 'this' song has been copied. I mean they can't just be happy to accept the fact that this can be something of 'this' band's original work. Maybe this is because they don't have enough faith on us. But here I'm talking about a very small number of people. Other than that, I'll say all of our fans enjoy our music and appreciate it.

Black: We call it cultural exchange. But when the "exchange" becomes one-sided and turns "following blindly" then the 'credit' goes entirely to the ever-expanding TV media and internet which also made us "culture-conscious" too. The common people are more aware now than the times of Tagore. So it is very obvious that the slightest resemblance will come under discreet scrutiny from the 'overreacting-newly-culture-conscious' minds.

CF: This is because we've seen most of the great bands of Bangladesh copy music from western bands over the years. It has happened so often that now we have this idea that Bangalis are incapable of world-class original creation.

There's a common 'misconception' that those who come into band music, come from relatively high

overnight. That's why the folk remixes are so popular all over the country. It's not that we can't do music for the mass. It's about TASTE. We'd like to change the taste of the listeners rather than changing ours by giving them quality music of a different taste. That'll take time to digest. But we feel the change already watching the response of the audience when we do live concerts outside Dhaka.

CF: Not at all, "Bangla" is a great example of high society people producing music for the masses. However, most UnGr bands are into rock or metal, very complex forms of music and not easily understood. This is a worldwide phenomenon, which is why Britney Spears sells more than Tool. This is a situation where the UnGr bands will have to persevere and "teach" the masses the joys of modern complex music, rather than "dumbing down" their style for the masses.

Does rivalry exist between bands in the UnGr music scene?

Artcell: I think that 'Rivalry' is not the proper word, but the word 'competition' fits in best. Well there is some and there should be some. Because of this competition we have and will be better musicians and bands in the future from this underground scene.

CF: The underground bands I hang out with are Aurtherhoin, Artcell and Black (although Aurtherhoin is not strictly underground). We are all great friends and although there is a friendly rivalry between us it is a positive thing.

We are all great friends, we are always there for each other and love working together. The ABC song "Aashirbaad" in the album Dinbodol is a great example of how Artcell, Black and Fate work together. I don't know much about the other bands in the underground but hope that ABC's friendship can be some sort of an example.

This is a typical question...but what advice do you have for young aspiring musicians...

Artcell: Listen to a lot of music, 'good music'!!! And practice a lot. Be a musician first before you form any band.

Black: Know your roots, follow your heart and try to express your true self and your feelings through music. Because music is not only about listening and enjoying, it is also about feelings and experiencing life aesthetically.

CF: Please get your basics right. Listen to the right bands and understand music theory. Pick up songs in their entirety because that is the best way to understand music theory. And practice, practice, practice. And play cricket in your spare time.

