

In Conversation

Agun unplugged

KARIM WAHEED

I was never certain that I'd take singing seriously as a profession but music comes naturally to me, just like breathing," reflects Agun.

Agun is a frontrunner in our musical arena. He is known for his versatility. Especially when it comes to singing playback for movies, he tends to render film songs according to the mood and personality of the character he is singing for. Hence, his voice sounds poles apart in different songs. This is Agun's claim to fame and also his one particular trait that is often erroneously criticised.

Agun started his career as the vocalist of the band, Sudden in 1988. Among Sudden's songs, Baishakhi Mela, Uttal Shomudro and Bhalobashi were well received. He decided to retire from Sudden and went solo in 1992. Songs rendered by him, for the movie Keyamat Thekey Keyamat are his breakthrough performance, according to Agun. The songs from the movie established him as a commercially viable artiste and also proved his musical finesse. He was honoured with a Bachshash award in '97 for his rendition of the song, O Amar Jonmohumi. Songs like January February from his latest album are huge hits.

So, how did Agun step in to the world of music?

"I don't recall a single day without music. I used to wake up in the morning to the tunes of my mother's rewar," reminisces Agun.

He adds, "My mother, Nilufar Yasmeen led a routine life, which can be labeled as the epitome of a purely devout artistic life. She often used to ask me to join her in her



alop. Regrettably, I never did any rewar in my whole life. My mother was not too keen on the idea, and I'm not saying I'm proud of disregarding traditional rewar but I believe music is in my blood. When you're the offspring of two artistes like Khan Ataur Rahman and Nilufar Yasmeen, who have their own legacies in the sphere of our music, you don't have to fret to attain

musical skills. Musical skills possess you.

"My dad, however, never pushed me or my siblings to become musicians. But he always used to say, 'Famous or infamous, whatever you want to be, you have to be one of the top three in your turf.' That's Khan Ataur Rahman for you."

"I'm perpetually restless, I can't abide by strict rules. This was the

only difference between me and my mother. I was closer to my father. He could relate to me, being a bohemian himself," says Agun.

"I always knew that I could sing but I never took it seriously until I had to perform at the farewell programme at my school. After that I joined Sudden and gradually music became my sole profession. Although, I'm not ashamed to admit that I didn't take music seriously when I started my career, lately I have been trying to religiously work on my music and I'm taking a perfectionist's approach to it. I've realised that is the only way people would remember me even when I'm not around," he continues.

On the state of the current music scene, Agun remarks, "We're going through a troubled phase but this is how the milieu is before an intense Nor'wester. I believe, a cultural renaissance is upon us."

Agun hasn't only limited himself to the world of music. Following the tradition of his father, he had made a debut as an actor through the movie Akhono Onek Raat. After that he had acted in the TV drama Ojana Shoikotey and the immensely popular TV serial Rong-er Manush.

"I do intend to take acting seriously and perhaps some day, I'd like to try out film direction but for the time being, I want to continue acting in TV plays," asserts Agun.

He is working on his next project, an album that is based on the sub-continental vintage music. "So far, seven songs are done."

I have used acoustic instruments such as, violin, santoor, trumpet, saxophone, grand piano, tabla, flute and sitar in the songs. I trust my fans will enjoy the efforts," says an optimistic Agun.

Sweety: Making it big on the small screen

NOVERA DEEPIITA

Tanvin Sweety is a young police officer, who means business. She has made it a point to punish the local miscreants, who get away with committing heinous crimes in broad daylight. She tends to give them a taste of their own medicine by serving them up with a 'good old fashioned bashing'.

This is the role, Sweety is portraying in the on-going drama serial The New Shabuj Opera.

When director Mamun ur Rashid cast Sweety for the role, she was quite uncertain whether she could do it. But after she was dressed up as an ASP, the director said, "You must do justice to the character with a bold performance." So, to make the performance realistic, Sweety literally beat up the actors who played the villainous roles. This beating up led to a month-long pain on the hoodlum's shoulder and a severe injury on a co-star's back.

Starting as a ramp model, Sweety became popular for her attractive appearance in television commercials that included cosmetics, boutiques, milk powder to detergent and electric cables. Sweety has acted in about 100 television plays including Shundari, Rupali Nadir Dheu, Haraner Nat Jamai, Jol Porey Pata Norey and Pothey Pothey Cholthey Cholthey. She played diverse roles ranging from an indigenous helpless widow, a fashionable teen, and a vindictive victim of the Liberation War to an ordinary deprived housewife.

As a theatre activist, Sweety proudly states that she had performed in some quality stage



Tanvin Sweety in the role of a police officer (C) as Fazlur Rahman Babu looks on (R)

plays that are considered as milestones in the theatre history of Bangladesh such as Payer Awaj Pawa Jay, Ekhone Kritodash, Meraj Fakirer Ma and Meherjan.

About her absence in commercials, Sweety says, "If I want to perform with dedication, I must concentrate on a single media. So, I have decided to act in plays with

commitment."

Dismayed at the present theatre scenario, Sweety says, "The increasing number of television channels has led to a decrease in the number of theatre-goers. Some new stages are being built in inconvenient venues where the majority of the audience are reluctant to go."

When asked about obscenity in ramp modelling, Sweety retorted, "When we used to walk the ramp, we never experienced any thing objectionable. Models need to have greater commitment. We don't necessarily have to imitate the western format blindly. However, we can always blend the best of east and west."

AT THE CANNES FILM FESTIVAL '05



Aishwarya Rai



Jackie Chan and Mallika Sherawat



Nicole Kidman

Star Wars gets 'record' release

Fans around the world are flocking to see the final Star Wars film in what is described as the widest simultaneous global movie release of all time.

Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith will be in cinemas in more than 100 countries by today.

It is the last installment in George Lucas' six-film, 27-year saga.

The film, which completes the story of how Darth Vader was born, came out in a handful of countries on Wednesday with most of the world getting to see it today.

The film sold a record number of advance tickets in North America and several other countries, analysts have said.

More box office records are expected to fall when more ticket information comes out in the next few days. The previous five Star Wars films have made a total of \$3.8bn (£2bn) at box offices worldwide.

Many fans dressed as characters from the films as they queued for hours - or, in some cases, even days and weeks - for the first screenings.

Source: BBC



Theatre Bibishab

Nagorik Natyangan Ensemble's current production



A scene from the play

ERSHAD KAMOL

Abdullah Al Mamun's play Bibishab was first staged by Dhaka Shubochan in 1994. Jamaluddin Hossain was the director of the play. Recently, Hossain has re-staged Bibishab with his own group Nagorik Natyangan Ensemble on May 18 at the Mahila Samity Stage.

Bibishab depicts the struggles of a middle class woman. Set against the post Liberation War era, Mamun shows the rehabilitation of the Pakistani collaborators.

The central character of the play has lost her beloved husband and two children during the Liberation War. Ironically, the culprit who was responsible for killing her family members in '71, regains his social status after the war, while the woman who sacrificed herself and

her family leads a miserable life in an independent Bangladesh. The story might strike a chord with many Bangladeshis.

As the sub-plot of the play, Mamun has depicted the class struggle in a feudal rural social structure. Moreover, the tendency of changing political parties and the politicians' compromise with the enemy for personal interest has also been depicted artistically in the Bibishab.

Director Jamaluddin Hossain's approach to the play is realistic. As a flashback, he has shown the historical speech delivered by Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7, 1971. Moreover, the migration of the freedom fighters to the border areas and the torture of the Pakistani collaborators have also appeared as the flashback scene

in Bibishab. However, the required pace was not maintained throughout the play.

Rezauzzaman Reza's set design is simple. He effectively creates the ambience of a rickshaw garage at the slums with a bamboo fence and spare parts of rickshaws. Light designer Thandu Raihan is simple but effective.

Rawshan Ara Hossain in the sequence when her husband was taken away by the Pakistani collaborators performed with ease. However, this effort was not sustained throughout the play. M Shahjahan, in his brief appearance as Pakistani collaborator, performed well. SM Mohsin as Rustom Kochwan seemed to over act.

Partha's mime charms Germans

AZZ MULLAH, from Germany

The German Radio's of the Bangla Division, which was initiated by Chancellor, Willy Brandt and writer Gunther Grass 30 years ago, arranged a cultural show recently.

The major attraction of the programme was performances by the renowned Bangalee mime Partha Prateem Majumdar.

The audience included Germans and members of the Bangalee organisations in Germany.

Many traveled all the way just to enjoy Partha's mime, which was followed by rounds of applause.



Partha (L) performing with Pinki

Gaan Bajna: Popularising Bangla music



Gaan Bajna, the hot new Bangla music show on Tara Bangla's music channel, has created ripples in Kolkata and now Bangladesh, says a press release. This is the world's first 24-hour satellite Bangla music channel. The music show is directed by Basharu Islam Munna and anchored by teenage pop star Tishma. The show is the first music programme to air music videos with the topmost Bangladeshi music stars on an international satellite channel seven days a week.

Exhibition Seasons of Splendour

AFSAR AHMED

An insignificant chunk of wood can be transformed into a precious art piece at the hands of a skilled artist. This was amply displayed at an ongoing exhibition of Shabin Shahriar at the Zainul Gallery of the Institute Of Fine Arts of Dhaka University.

Titled Prokriety O Pashu (Nature and Beast), this is the 5th solo exhibition of Shabin, who is a lecturer of the Drama and Music department of Rajshahi University. "I am addicted to make an artwork by carving, cutting and burning the wood and adding splashes of colour to it," reveals the artist.

"The surface of the wood is my canvas and the hammer, chisel, router, drill, jigs, burner and other tools are my paint brush," laughs Shabin.

"At first I was inspired by the work of Farooq Ahmed, a pioneer of this genre in Bangladesh, but now I've developed my own style and technique," says the artist.

Shabin's ongoing exhibition features 43 woodcarving paintings and a set of sculptures. The essence of nature dominates the exhibition. In the artist's own words, "Most of my creations in this exhibition depict the kaleidoscopic nature of the earth, although the exhibition is titled Prokriety O Pashu, which is in fact taken from the name of my only sculpture."

"Nature has its own rules. But people always try to dominate it, which dilutes the beauty of nature. In fact, every human being has a dual personality. Sometimes the evil side dominates over the righteous one and vice versa. And I am trying to project this complexity of life in my sculpture which is in fact my first sculpture," says Shabin.

Nature has wide range of diversity. And Shabin distinctively captures the glimpses of natural beauty of the country in the wooden panel. The compositions of six seasons, in particular, are magnificent. The summer is visualised in a rough manner with the use of a red and orangish tone in the wood with some trees in the backdrop. The monsoon is depicted with the drops of rain on water lilies in the pond. The autumn

is exemplified by the kash phul and a clear sky, sometimes sketched with white clouds.

The late autumn, known as Hemanta in Bangla, shows farmers carrying new paddy from the field. The date tree signals the winter and the earthen pot tied up on the tree for sweet juice, is elegantly done. Heralding spring are the cherry blossoms. All these are done so realistically by carving and using various shades of appropriate colour that the compositions are easily understandable. Apart from the burnt texture and oil and pastel colour, the artist uses bronze and brass sheets, cane, red chandan seeds and colourful stones.

A series, titled Prokriety (Nature), captures the typical scenes of rural Bangladesh. "In this series I use some realistic and semi-realistic motifs to portray nature. The flora and fauna, the moon on high, volumes of cloud, fishermen, farmers and other common subjects are illustrated in this series," says Shabin.

In another series titled Bashati (Locality), the subjects turn abstract occasionally. However, one can easily perceive the shadow of the houses on the river banks.

The most appealing composition is the series titled Drishtir Nanastar (Various levels of vision). At first one may get perplexed and confused about the work. However, as soon as one discovers the inner meaning a whole new world opens up for him/her. "This series is completely experimental and creates the effect of an illusion," chuckles Shabin. However, the next moment he gets serious and questions, "Does a particular object create the same impact every time we see it?" He himself replies, "Not at all. Actually our reaction to the same object changes constantly. And every time we discover the same thing in a new way. This is what I am trying to show in this series."

The exhibition is worth a saunter and will continue till May 22.



Prokriety O Pashu