

# Tareque and Catherine's latest venture *Ontarjatra*

KAVITA CHARANJI

THE countdown has begun for the release of Tareque and Catherine Masud's new feature film titled *Ontarjatra* (Inner Journey). Even as the last minute tasks are underway, critics believe that the movie will create a stir since the husband and wife team are known for other renowned and socially relevant films such as the recent *Matir Moina* and *Mukrir Gaan*.

*Ontarjatra*, says director Tareque, is the "exploration of the complex issues of

dislocation and identity." Zeroing in on the plot, he says the focus is on a divorced mother (Shireen, ably played by Sara Zaker) and her son (Sohail, played by Rifaquat Rasheed) who come back to Bangladesh after 15 years overseas. The return is prompted by the boy's father's sudden death and funeral.

As Tareque points out, "The story follows the conflicting reactions of mother and son as they, in very different ways, try to come to terms with this loss." The son, a British-bred teenager with no memory of his father or his homeland, undertakes a

journey of self-discovery when he comes to Bangladesh. For his mother, the return evokes both nostalgia for her youth and anxiety in anticipation of a difficult reunion with her ex-in-laws. The return of the mother and son duo brings different branches of the family face to face, across generations and cultures, maintains Tareque.

Other cast members are Momen Chowdhury, Rokeya Prachy, Jayanto Chattopadhyaya, Nasrine Karim, Harold Rasheed and Raisa Anwar. In the guest cast are Anushey and Bunjo.



Tareque Masud

The action of the film is mostly divided between Sylhet and Dhaka, while the opening shot is in a recreated London home. The film, believes theatre and TV personality Sara Zaker, is unique because it is "devoid of glamour and frills". Cast in the central role of the mother Shireen, she says, "The film evokes the sound and noise of Dhaka. It shows present Bangladesh--complete with the mushrooming multi-storeyed buildings and clatter, but at the same time there is no negative imaging of Dhaka. For instance, Shireen takes a rickshaw ride through the Dhaka streets and the film depicts Dhaka as it is in reality. At the end of it you feel good about the country."

What is *Ontarjatra's* USP? Tareque believes that the film stands apart from others since it is the first digital film in Bangladesh.

The film is now in its final stage of post-production as the digital to 35mm transfer is being done in New York. Reputed film producing concern, Maasranga Productions, is covering the 35mm transfer cost and will hold the exclusive Bangladesh distribution rights. The film is likely to be released in the next couple of months.

Tareque and Catherine are quick to express their gratitude to the British Council for its major support to the film. The film also received the prestigious Hubert Bals Foundation grant for scripting.

*Ontarjatra* is one more milestone for the Masuds, well known for their superb films. Their latest oeuvre is truly a journey worth undertaking for viewers. Hopefully it will earn more laurels for the country like *Matir Moina*.

## Tête-à-tête

# Walking down the ramp with Mithila

NOVERA DEEPIKA

Rafiath Rashid Mithila is a common face in the fashion parade of Neelanjana Palli. Her graceful appearance sets her apart from others on stage.

Mithila began her modelling career in 2002 by taking to the ramp in Neelanjana Palli's fashion show. She performed a folk dance with one of Kumar Biswas's popular songs, *Jaray ghar dila shangshar dila re*. She also acted in a commercial promo later.

In the beginning she was not very serious about modelling. However, after receiving appreciation from the audience, Mithila continued to participate in fashion shows--but with the caveat that they would be organised by Neelanjana Palli. As she says, "I find the other fashion shows too westernised which does not reflect our true culture."

As a student of the art school Nandan, some of Mithila's oil paintings of landscapes were displayed in Drik Gallery in a group exhibition. She rendered songs as a backup

vocal in the album, *Kathopokathon* by Tasan, the vocalist of Black.

Mithila is the model in the music video *Moyna Go* by the popular musician Habib, which will be aired soon on television. According to Mithila, "I have consented to act in the video because it is not just another stereotyped video aired on television channels. Directed by Samir and Arnab, the video is artistically done."

Mithila took basic lessons in creative dance under Gulam Mustafa of Benuka dance school in her teens. However, she didn't continue for long. Nevertheless, she believes that the dance lessons helped her give appropriate expressions while walking down the ramp. Mithila also believes that a model must



have a distinct aesthetic sense.

Among the models worldwide, Milind Soman is her favourite, while at home Tupa is her idol.



Sara Zaker and Rifaquat Rasheed in the film

## Tonatuni Festival '05 in June

Production house Tonatuni is set to organise a five-day-long festival for the second time, says a press release. Beginning from June 2, the festival will be held at the National Theatre Stage of Shilpakala Academy. Tonatuni will stage two new productions *Dui Pakhui* and *Chhorar Desh* on the occasion.

*Dui Pakhi* is a one-hour dance drama developed from the poems and songs of Rabindranath Tagore. Choreography by popular dancer Deepa Khondokar, the dance drama will present child artistes.

Sujeo Shyam is the music composer.

The other production *Chhorar Deshey*, based on different nursery rhymes, is choreographed by Tamanna Rahman. Music by Anisur Rahman Tanu and Ahmed Imtiaz Bulbul, the narrator for both the productions is Mujibur Rahman Dilu.

The theme of the festival is *Ekti CD Ekti Pran*. A new audio album, *Khela Bhangar Khela* will be released on this occasion. The album contains songs, poetry

recitation and instrumentals by famous doctors of Bangladesh and India. A share of the profit will be donated for insolvent patients and diseased children.

*Toray Bandha Ghorar Dim*, a production staged before, will also be presented. Apart from these programmes, popular artistes, including Mita Haque, Rothindra Nath Roy, Kiron Chandra Roy, Shakila Zafar, sarod player Ustad Shahadat Hossain Khan and Ruaman Islam Khan will perform at the festival.



Young artistes performing in the dance drama *Dui Pakhi*

## Death anniversary of Ustad Abed Hossain Khan

On the occasion of the death anniversary of Ustad Abed Hossain Khan, the students of Ustad Ayet Ali Khan Sangeet Niketon will organise a discussion session followed by a soiree of classical music at the Goethe-Institut (German Cultural Centre) on May 27, says a press release.

The High Commissioner of Australia to Bangladesh Lorraine Barkar will be present as chief guest while the former Director General of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Mobarok Hossain Khan will preside over the programme.

Eminent sitar player and celebrated music director of Bangladesh, Ustad Abed Hossain Khan was born in Brahmanbaria in 1929. Eldest son of Ustad Ayet Ali Khan, Ustad Abed was involved with Bangladesh Betar for 36 long years. He was a professor at the Music College and has written many research-oriented books on music. An eminent sitar player, Ustad Abed also



had expertise on the sarod. He earned acclaim for composing music for the film *Nodi O Nari* by Professor Humayun Kabir.

In 1985 he received the Ekushey Padak for his contribution to music. The founding member of Ustad Ayet Ali Khan Sangeet Niketon, Ustad Abed died in 1996.

## Tribute

# Ismail Merchant: The film world's bright spark is no more

Ismail Merchant, the producer whose venerable partnership with director James Ivory led to such Oscar-winning costume dramas as *A Room with a View*, *Howard's End* and *The Remains of the Day*, died in a London hospital on Wednesday last. He was 68.

The filmmaker had reportedly been suffering from stomach problems over the past year, including undergoing an operation recently for abdominal ulcers. Born in Bombay (now Mumbai) in December 1936, Merchant came to New York University in 1958, and earned a business degree. While there, he developed an affinity for cinema and produced his first film, 1960's *The Creation of Woman*, a 14-minute short film that was an official US entry at the Cannes Film Festival that year and eventually earned Merchant his first Oscar nomination.

A year later he met Ivory at a screening of the latter's documentary *The Sword and the Flute*, and the two struck up a friendship. They soon decided to



go into business together making English-language costume dramas for the Indian market.

Their first film outing was *The Householder*, a comedy-drama about young Indian newlyweds based on a novel by Ruth Praver Jhabvala.

In 1974, Merchant got behind the camera for the Indian short film *Mahatma and the Mad Boy*. It wasn't until 1993 that he finally made his feature film debut with *In Custody*, but for the most part,

he stuck to the business side.

Even after their heyday in the late '80s through early '90s, Merchant-Ivory continued to churn out well-crafted period stories, most notably 1995's *Jefferson in Paris*, starring Nick Nolte and Gwyneth Paltrow, 1996's *Surviving Picasso* and 2001's *The Golden Bowl*. More recently, they teamed up for 2003's *Le Divorce*, a comedy of manners featuring Kate Hudson and Naomi Watts.

Prior to his death, Merchant was working on several projects, including *The Goddess*, a Bollywood-style musical with Tina Turner and *The White Countess*, a costume drama about an American diplomat in 1930s Shanghai, starring Ralph Fiennes and Natasha Richardson. The latter is due out in November.

Aside from his producing duties, Merchant was also a chef and author of several cookbooks. Among them *Ismail Merchant's Indian Cuisine* is quite popular.



A scene from the upcoming TV serial

ERSHAD KAMOL

Romantic hero Tauquir Ahmed riding a horse, commanding his troops to "fight bravely" and Jayanto Chattopadhyay wielding his sword against British forces -- all this and more will feature in the upcoming TV serial *Titumirer Bansher Kella*. The serial, by Shakhawat Hossain, is a biography of the legendary Titumir, a character well-known for his revolt against the oppressive British Raj.

To film the serial, Shakhawat with his crews and artistes spent 20 days shooting at Kaliakoir. Scriptwriter as well as director of the play,

Shakhawat says, "The story of Titumir is linked with the revolution by the peasants. To picture the authentic scenes, we made a bamboo fort in the jungle at Kaliakoir. Designer Zunaid Eusuf made a fort 35 feet high with bamboo and the Fort Gate was 50 feet high. There was also a 60-foot watchtower. We hired 20 horses and an elephant for the shooting. To portray a king's palace, we have used Srifaltali zamindar palace at Kaliakoir. Moreover, we made an iron cannon creating the authentic fort ambience during the war.

"A huge crowd was needed for

realistic shooting. So over 100 enthusiastic villagers took part in the shooting. Three war scenes have been picturised. For the combat scenes I took support from Film Development Corporation (FDC) technicians. We used dummy pistols, explosives and rifles. However, no direct war scenes have been picturised, as it is tough to present an authentic war scene with limited technical facilities. Cameraman Siakat has done a

great job."

Any calamity during the shooting? Shakhawat says, "Tauquir fell down from the horse and was badly hurt."

Debendra Udash plays the character of young Titumir and Jayanto Chattopadhyay enacts the role of adult Titumir. Mamanur Rashid will don the role of an evil police officer who is a British collaborator and is responsible for a Hindu-Muslim riot. Ferdausi Majumdar, as the queen, is

also hostile to Titumir. However, Tauquir Ahmed, the prince, helps Titumir in the fight against British and their collaborators. ATM Shamsuzzaman in the role of a beggar is sympathetic to Titumir. Other remarkable cast members of *Titumirer Bansher Kella* are Khairul Alam Shobuj, Fazlur Rahman Babu, Rokeya Prachi, Dr Inamul Haque and others.



A replica of the bamboo fort

## American Idol 4 finale Country Crooner rocks out the rocker

She's a little bit country, he's a little bit rock and roll -- and country won! American viewers weren't ready to embrace a Marine singing country songs as the American Idol a couple of years ago, but they certainly were ready for a blonde, beautiful Country Carrie this year.

Shortly after Carrie Underwood was named the new "American Idol," she was greeted by an enthusiastic and important fan: A top executive at the company that will put out her first recording.

"We can't wait to meet with you in New York," Richard Sanders, general manager of RCA Music Group, told Underwood after briefly interrupting an interview.

Underwood, a 22-year-old from Checotah, Oklahoma, with a sweet smile and an affinity for country music, looked dazed after besting runner-up Bo Bice in Fox TV's talent contest.

"This is the best night of my life. And it's going to get better," Underwood gleamed.

Friends and family describe Underwood as a polite, quiet, small-town girl who is dedicated to music. Underwood's mother, Carole, said she hoped her daughter's success wouldn't change her. But Underwood said there's no reason to worry. She plans to focus on the country sound and won't abandon her roots.

"I want my permanent address to be in Oklahoma," she said. "Someday, when I get married and I have kids, that's where I want to live."

Bice, 29, of Helena, Alabama, would have been the oldest "Idol" winner. He brought an unexpected rock edge to the show's usually mainstream pop style with songs such as the 1970's hit *Vehicle*.

Bice said he was satisfied with the experience. He entered the "Idol" contest on a bet with his mom, expecting only that the exposure might get him better gigs back home. Turns out

the payoff will be bigger. "We can look forward to an album coming out soon, so keep your eyes open," Bice said. He did not provide further details.

Compiled by Cultural Correspondent



Carrie Underwood