

Alif Laila

Weaving a delicate tune of ragas

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

It was daybreak in Washington DC and Alif Laila was already on her way to meet up with Pandit Partha Chatterjee, from Kolkata. This was sometime around 1988-89 and summer classes were about to begin. Alif had waited for this particular opportunity to train under him for quite a while and she could hardly wait.

Despite a busy schedule of raising two sons and balancing her social life, Alif, AKA Kunkum, had managed to pursue her artistic ambitions, be it painting delicate Moghal art on ceramics or playing the sitar; the latter being closer to her heart.

In her teens, she initially trained under Ustad Mir Kasem Khan for eight years, in Dhaka. After her marriage to Afique Rehman, an architect, she moved off to Kuwait and later migrated to the US. Between settling down in a new place and juggling other responsibilities, Alif realised a few years later that her passion for playing the sitar had grown even deeper and she actively started to search for guidance and tutelage. She started taking sitar lessons from Kartik Seshadri, Joya Bose, Debu Chowdhury, Anindo Chatterjee, Tejendra Majumda and Krishna Bhatt. Under the guidance of Pandit Partha Chatterjee, a disciple of Nikhil Banerjee, she learned about the intricate details, various techniques and raga-roop for four years.

It is obviously difficult to create a *mahol* (environment) for North Indian classical music in the West. However, there is a definite revival and I am happy with the response



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from the audience," says Alif. By now, Alif had been invited to perform at concerts across the US. She has performed at the Gandhi

Memorial Centre, Fort Collins University, University of Florida, the Shiva Vishnu Temple (College Park), Annual Marathi Mandal

Classical Concert (Rutgers), Penn State University, the Classical Chamber Music Series sponsored by the Asiatic Society of Washington. Incidentally she has also performed at concerts in Hawaii and Switzerland. "I was blessed to be able to perform sitar with my guru, Pandit Anindo Chatterjee on the tabla," she said. In Bangladesh, she has performed at the Bishwa Shahithyo Kendra, the Indian Cultural Centre, the German Cultural Centre and also for Bangladesh Television.

Any memorable performances? "My performance at the Shaheed Minar premises in 2004 was a momentous occasion for me. Playing *Palash Kafi*, a mixture of *Bhimpallesi* and *Kafi*, I was quite apprehensive about how people would respond to semi-classical instrumentals because until then, only street plays, songs and dances were performed annually as part of the homage to our Language Martyrs. I was elated to know that I was the first to perform a solo instrumental recital there," Alif said.

"To my astonishment the crowd seemed to sway to the melodious *dhun* (tune) followed by requests for an encore. As tears trickled down my cheek, I could feel the pulse of the people blend with the endless emotion of the raga *Polash Kafi* particularly in the month of February, when *Polash* flowers are in full bloom," she said.

"Another eventful day was in October 2004 when I had the opportunity to play raga *Desh* exclusively for Sur Samrat, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. Though the performance was brief, it was a unique experience to train for a week in

instrumentals and vocals along with other top artists like Shishir Kona Dhar and Tajendra Mitra among others," Alif added.

On her preparation for concerts, the talented sitar player says, "Before I take on a concert, I set my own target and study the subject religiously. If I am to perform six months from now, I keep listening to the same raga over and over again. Finally I try to extend the raga 1000 times from whatever I have listened to and grasped from my guru. Playing a raga deserves total concentration and devotion."

"I always try to balance my time between my family and my passion for sitar. Now that my sons are graduating, I have enough time in hand to concentrate and make most of my time for music."

Alif released her debut album, *Devotion*, in 1999, followed by *Inner Voice* in 2003 and *Meditation with Sitar*, in 2005. "This time, I have plans to record a new album in Kolkata. On the tabla will be Anubrata Chatterjee, a brilliant musician. I will play ragas *Jayjayanti*, *Khamaj* and *Bhairavi*."

"I am a dreamer, as most artists are I fantasize of someday playing my sitar on the stairs of Taj Mahal and weave delicate designs with ragas close to my heart such as *Malkaus*, *Bhairavi*, *Khamaj*, *Darbari* and *Ahhog*. It is an artistic piece of architecture where bliss and pain merge into one; very much similar to the ragas," she added.

Knowing Alif as intimately as I do since our school days, I would not be surprised if her dreams come true.

Nurturing young talent

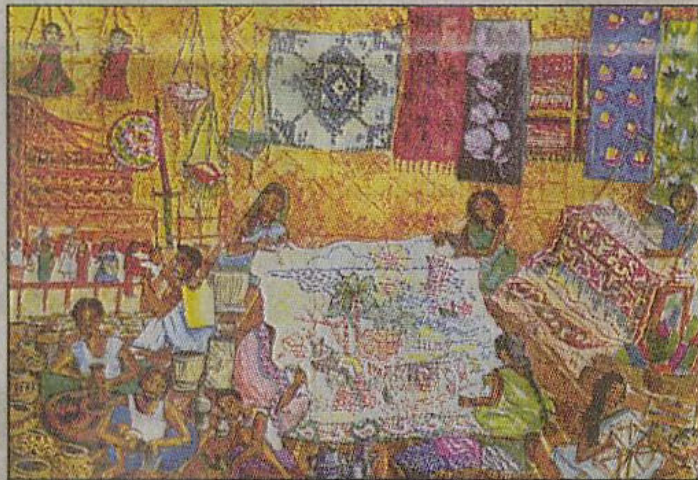
4th Int'l Children-Art Biennale Bangladesh '06

KHALID-BIN-HABIB

Imagination, curiosity and a feel for colour--these are the ingredients most child artists have in abundance. To nurture upcoming artistic talent in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA) and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MWCA) in association with UNICEF organised a children-art competition to mark the 4th International Children-Art Biennale Bangladesh-2006.

This was announced at a press conference on February 16 at Shishu Academy Art Gallery. Chairperson of BSA, Zubaida Gulshan Ara, the director of BSA Dhaka, MM Niaz Uddin, programme officer of the BSA, Samina Nafies, representative of ATN Bangla, Tashik Ahmed were present at the press conference.

MM Niaz Uddin, Director BSA delivered a speech about the competition to the journalists. He said, "Child art has an universal appeal. It is the rhyme that comes from the inner heart of a child. It is an open window, the social reflection of a nation. Child art also reflects the political and economic scenario of a country. We know that every child



The artwork by Sheikh Sadia Monowara Usha (11) that won first prize in last year's competition

has an inner creativity. This creativity should be explored all over the world, as it can be the key to the child's self-reliance."

The competitors are divided into six groups. The best painting will be selected from each group. The best painters will get gold medals, including one Grand Prix, one gold, three silver and six honorary prizes in each section. Three participants

will share the second prize. Six participants will receive special prizes.

The last date of submission of the paintings is March 31, 2006. The mailing address -- Director, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, Old High Court Compound, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

The Daily Star and ATN Bangla are the media partners of the competition.

Ekushey cultural programme at Rabindra Sarobar

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Besides its ongoing cultural programme to celebrate Ekushey at Central Shaheed Minar premises, Shammillito Sangskritik Jote (SSJ) has arranged another programme of cultural events, in-

cluding music, recitation and street theatre at Rabindra Sarobar.

Yesterday, acclaimed cultural personality Kalim Sharafi inaugurated the cultural programme at Rabindra Sarobar. Renowned cultural activists delivered speeches

in the opening programme, which was presided over by Nasiruddin Yousuff, the president of SSJ.

After the inauguration, SSJ activists rendered patriotic songs. The programme will continue till February 21.

Ontorjatra to debut in the Int'l Film Festival, Bangladesh



Sara Zaker (R) and co-artist in a scene from Ontorjatra

ERSHAD KAMOL

The long awaited Tareque Masud and Catherine Masud's movie *Ontorjatra* will be released in the 3rd International Film Festival Bangladesh, which will continue from March 1-16.

Ontorjatra is an intimate exploration of the complex issues of dislocation and identity in a diasporic world. Through the story of a divorced mother and her son, who return to Bangladesh after 15 years abroad, the film follows a transforming experience: For the son, a British-bred teenager with no memory of his father or 'homeland', the return to Bangladesh is a journey of self-actualisation and

rediscovery. In turn for the mother the return journey signifies a mixture of nostalgia for her youth, and anxiety in anticipation of a difficult reunion.

Tareque and Catherine have put in special efforts on the technical aspect of the movie. Tareque said, "*Ontorjatra* is the first film in Bangladesh to be shot in digital format for transfer to 35mm film."

Explaining the reason behind shooting in digital format and transforming it to 35 mm format, Tareque said, "Bangladeshi technical hands have expertise in digital format. As a result we have got quality cinematography, despite the lack of technical facilities in comparison with developed coun-

tries. I believe this technique will help the young filmmakers to overcome the technical limitations. Besides, this is for the first time in Bangladesh that full Dolby digital sound system has been used in a movie."

Sara Zaker, Rifaqat Rasheed, Abdul Momen Choudhury, Rokya Prachy, Jayanto Chattopadhyay, Harold Rasheed, Nasrine R. Karim, Raisa Nawar are the major cast members of the movie.

Ontorjatra is made with the support of the British Council and the Hubert Bals Fund of the Rotterdam Film Festival. It is a Maasranga production.

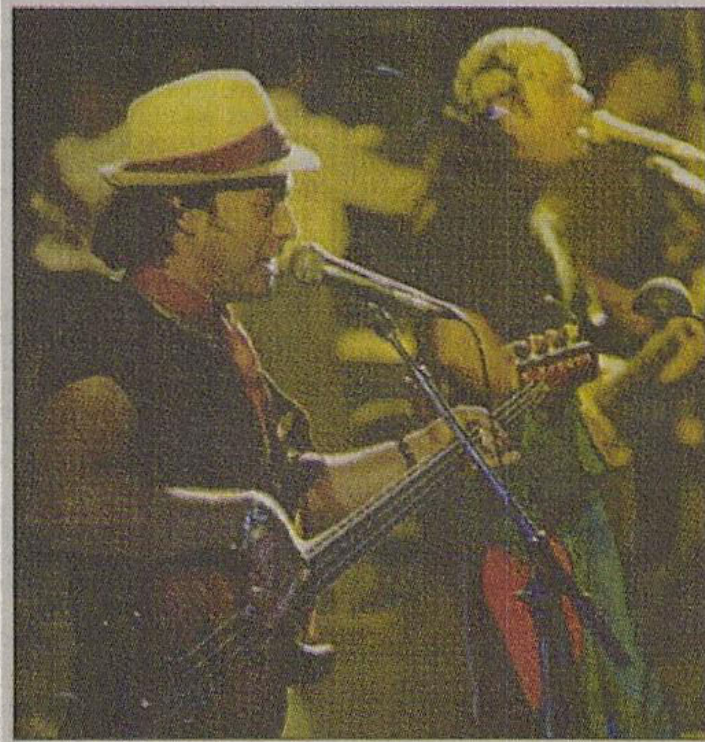
The evolution of band music since Independence

CULTURE DESK

Band rock music in Bangladesh embarked on its journey soon after the country's Liberation. Azam Khan, a proud freedom fighter, led the way with his band Ucharan, singing hard-hitting lyrics. Others to entertain the audience in Bangla pop and folk rock styles around the same time were Feroze Shai, Ferdous Waheed, Pilu Momtaz, and

Fakir Alamgir.

Many more bands came on the scene during the '80s with original Bangla songs presented in the Western band format. It caught on like wild fire among the youth. The energy put out on stage; looks and the personal styles of the musicians; sound of guitar and drums, and the hard-hitting lyrics gave the youth something they could relate to more easily. A new genre of



Miles

Bangla music was born. A quiet revolution started, which has eventually culminated into large stadium concerts and corporate sponsorships today.

Throughout the '90s band music gained immense support largely from the youth. The country's fledgling record industry played a major role since the mid '80s in establishing band music by taking out cassettes/albums of bands regularly. Television, i.e., BTV (as there were no satellite channels then) also began regular programmes on the increasingly popular band music. However, most fans believe that today's TV channels do not air enough band music of quality.

Every Bangladeshi in and outside the country will agree that band music is recognised as an established form of Bangla music today. Not everyone may take to it, but it has huge popularity nevertheless. Bangladeshi bands are also carving a niche for themselves. In fact, some of them are on par with international groups in terms of compositions, skillful playing and exciting performances.

Bangladeshi bands have enriched Bangla music, resulting in a wider choice for listeners. Some of the longest lasting bands and those who have contributed immensely to make Bangla rock popular in Bangladesh and abroad are Souls (*Mone Shudhu Mone Chuche*), Feedback (*Melae Jaire*, *Moushumi*), Miles (*Chand Tara*,

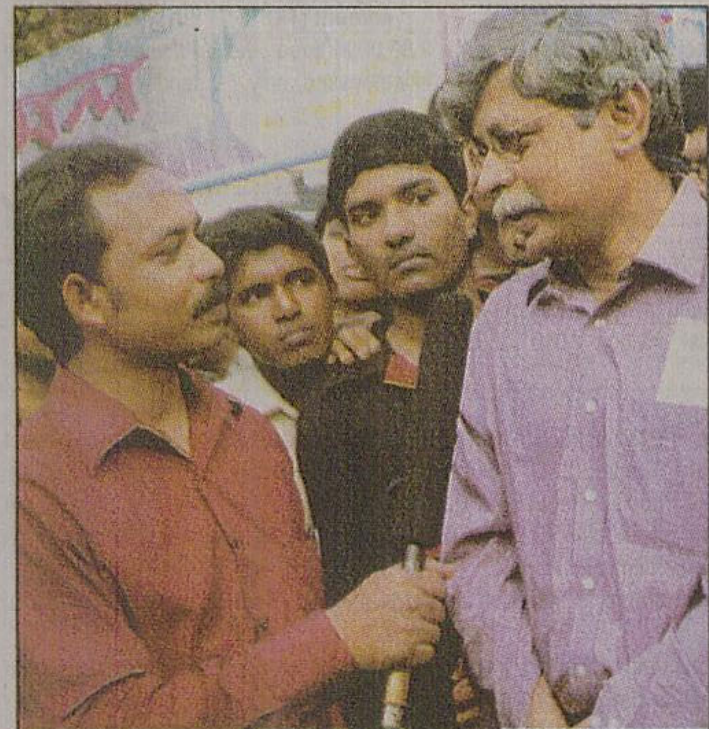


James

Prothom Premier Moto, Dorodia, Phirre Dao, Dhiki Dhiki, Jala Jala, LRB (Shei Tumi, Ferari Mone) and Nagar Baul/James (*Tarae Tarae Rotie Debo, Maa*).

It is open to question whether Bangla rock would ever have taken off in the country if we had not achieved our Independence, our freedom to sing in our own

language, even non-conformist and rebellious songs. This freedom of expression must be protected at any cost. Every citizen deserves it. Every artiste has a right to experiment. We hope that in future also, Bangladeshi bands will continue to produce exceptional original songs and put Bangladesh on the world map.



Boimela Protidin is aired live on Channel i everyday at 4:25 pm. The programme highlights new attractions at the Ekushey book fair. Writers' and fair-goers' reaction, comments regarding the fair are also featured in the programme. The host is seen talking to noted science fiction writer Muhammad Zafar Iqbal (R) in the photograph.

Japanese Film Festival

The world of Yasujiro Ozu

Film buffs can look forward to the upcoming Japanese Film Festival on February 17 and February 18. The festival will be held at the Shaheed Zia Auditorium, Bangladesh National Museum.

The films are *Floating Weeds* (3:30 pm-5:30 pm on February 17), *The End of Summer* (6:00 pm-8:00 pm, also on the first day), *Late Spring* (11:00 am-01:00 pm on February 18) and *Hen in the Wind* (01:30 pm-03:00 pm).

The common denominator of these films is that they are directed by the widely acclaimed Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1962). Initially Japanese distributors refused to release his works abroad, fearing that the West wouldn't appreciate the subtle beauty of his films at a time when the 'samurai' films of Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi were winning laurels at international film festivals, says a press release. Fortunately such apprehensions were unfounded and Ozu

has won recognition in the West as one of the filmmaking greats. Ozu's work is described as simple, contemplative and edged with nostalgia and sadness.

Here's a look at the films being screened:

Floating Weeds: This film expresses nostalgia for old customs and manners over a passage of time. On the silver screen, the viewer gets to see quarrels between the hero and his mistress, the hero's attitude to his son, who does not know his real father and other elements.

End of Summer: The film was made as a comedy. Ozu's portrayal of an old man was excellent. Ryu Chishu, a familiar face in Ozu's films, appears only in the last sequence of the work. While generating some laughs, the film effectively captures the pathos of the downfall of a store inherited through many generations and the humour of the old man who dies

suddenly.

Last Spring: From the script that Ozu jointly wrote with Noda Kogo, he depicts the feelings of a middle-aged widower and his only daughter when his remarriage is suggested and her marriage is decided. With this film, Ozu and Noda formed a partnership and since then had produced a number of motion pictures depicting the loneliness of a middle-aged or older man.

Hen in the Wind: The story revolves around the choices that women were forced to make when Japan was recovering economically from the war years. A mother sells herself to be able to pay for her son's illness and her husband cannot forgive her. The family in the film represents Japan's tragedy and how only after the wounds of guilt were atoned for, could they rebuild their lives.



A scene from Floating Weeds