

# Grooming young talents in classical music

## In conversation with Shipra Khan

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

At a recent workshop on classical music, two young disciples of Begum Shipra Khan – known to her students as 'Guru ma' -- presented a collection of ragas to the assembled audience

followed it up with a *tarana* with equal ease. Next, Nusrat Jahan Shathi, a barrister by profession, presented raga *Ragesree*. Shathi improvised on raga *Ragesree* based on *sringaar raas* (romantic tone), in *bilambit* and *drut kheyal*. When her students had com-

experience in training vocalists of Bangladesh and India for the last two decades.

Shipra recalled the first time she had come to Bangladesh in 1987 with her mentor and husband, the illustrious *sarengi* maestro late Ustad Sagiruddin Khan. They had come to Bangladesh on invitation from Shadhana, an institution aimed at nurturing classical music in Bangladesh. What had struck her most at that time was the tremendous level of enthusiasm amongst the young learners eager to train in classical music.

Throughout his career, Ustad Sagiruddin Khan had accompanied the master exponents of classical music in the subcontinent. After he retired from playing at live concerts he felt it an opportune time to devote himself to training the classical vocalists in both India and Bangladesh.

"Artistes of repute – Nilufar Yasmin, Sabina Yasmin, Subir Nandi, Khairul Anam Shakeel, Shaheen Samad, Dalia Nausheen and many more showed keen interest in joining the workshops under Ustadji," said Shipra. During their short visits to Dhaka, Shipra Khan took a deep interest in budding artistes and started training them.

Shipra herself comes from a musical background. Influenced by her father Fonibhushan Datta Rai Chowdhury of Mymensingh, Shipra graduated from Rabindra Bharati. Born and brought up in Kolkata, she trained under Sagiruddin Khan for about 8 years, specialising in Delhi and Banaras *gharana*. In 2006 Shipra received the 'Best Guru Ma award' from Haldia Cultural Classical Academy. She is involved with West Bengal Cultural Academy and Salt Lake Classical Academy to name a few.

She has trained Anushey, Anirey, Nazia, Sadaaf, Paresha Zarmeen, Preeti, Shama and many others. "We noticed that the students' performances were enthusiastically

received by the audiences as they presented classical songs and improvised on various ragas with *alaap, taan, bol baat* and *sargam*," said Shipra Khan.

Since Sagiruddin's demise, Shipra Khan has been holding workshops for upcoming artistes in keeping with the musical style and tradition of her late husband.

"Classical music is a pure performing art form. The more the artistes get to perform the more at ease they become in presenting the intricate styles of expressing a raga, since ragas bloom as you move on from *alaap* to its fast paced *bandish, taan* and *sargam*. This might be extremely difficult without regular practice," she says. "Through the *guru sishya parampara*, singers seek advice on the process of *rewaz*, the different styles of presentation among the different schools of thought known as *gharana*, and the applications of different notes and grammar of classical music," explains Shipra.

Although Shipra Khan is happy

with the development of classical music among her students, she is far from impressed on the state of classical music in the country. "Classical music is purely devotional. Developing an emotional sense of expressing ragas develop with time. Patience, regularity and rigorous practice are its prerequisites. There are no short cuts," she stresses.

"As proper training institutes to nurture this art form are far and few between in Bangladesh," she says, "young talents face an uphill task in honing their skills. In stark contrast to Bangladesh, in West Bengal, Mumbai, Chennai or New Delhi, classical music – both vocal and instrumental – is practiced religiously, and that too under direct government patronage. One is amazed at the rise of interest among disciples from all across Europe, US and the Far East to train in our rich eastern classical music," she adds. "It is up to us to continue to nurture such a rich vein of talent in this part of the world".



Shipra Khan

of music lovers. The younger of the two students, Shaveena Anam Preeti, presented raga *Emon*. After a short *alaap* or prelude, Preeti performed *bilambit ektal* in 48 beats and then moved on to the fast paced *drut kheyal* in *teen taal* interlaced by *taan* and *sargam*. She

pleted their performances, Shipra Khan took to the stage and presented a *thumree* on *misra kafi* followed by a *dadra* in *manjhi khamaaj*. She was accompanied by Siddiqi on the harmonium and Bimol Hawladar on the *tabla*. After the music session she spoke of her



A performance featuring young artistes trained by Shipra Khan

## Musical evening at Bengal Café

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Matrix Solutions arranged a solo musical programme featuring Lopa Hossain at Bengal Café on July 25.

In the programme titled *Shundor Hou Nari* (?), Lopa

performed 11 songs -- including Tagore, Nazrul and popular *adhunik* songs of Sabina Yasmin, Runa Laila, Mitali Mukharjee, Samina Chowdhury and others. Lopa, a student of department of Mass Communication and

Journalism, University of Dhaka and a news presenter on ATN Bangla, entertained the music enthusiasts with her renditions of familiar numbers.

The soiree started with a tribute to the martyrs of the Independence War through a rendition of *Shob kota janala khule dao na*, popularised by Sabina Yasmin. Lopa then sang *Badol diner prothom kodom phul*, a Tagore song on rain. Lalson song *Ami opaar hoye boshhey achhi, adhunik* songs -- *Kobita porar prohor eshechhye*, *Jokhon thambe kolahal* and a song from the film *Srabon Megher Din -- Amar bhanga ghorey*, followed. The artiste also performed a Nazrul song *Jonom jonom tobo tore kandibo*. The programme ended with the Tagore song *Bhalobeshey jodi shukh nahi tobey keno michhey bhalobasha*.

A number of teachers of DU, including Professor A.A.M.S. Arafin Siddiqi, Golam Rahman, and artists Sujit Mustafa, Shawkot Ali Emon and others attended the programme and admired Lopa's performance.



Lopa Hossain sings at Bengal Café

## “Brishtir Phool”: Film adaptation of Shamsur Rahman's novel

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

In the tele-film *Brishtir Phool*, Professor of Philosophy Jamil Akther is a middle-aged bachelor who, much to his reluctance, finds himself in a developing relationship with a smart, much younger Nusrat. They have phone conversations quite often. However, the situation gets complicated as Jamil feels uncomfortable getting intimate with

someone half his age. Flashbacks from both Jamil and Nusrat's lives reveal their past, unrequited love interests. Will they get a second shot at romantic bliss?

Seasoned actor Alamgir and Tinni play the lead characters in the tele-film. Raju Alim has adapted the novel by Shamsur Rahman. The tele-film is all set to be aired.



Alamgir and Tinni in *Brishtir Phool*

## Cultural Etiquette: Gone Amiss?



SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

As a visitor to the country, I enjoy going to the cultural events occasionally. A glimpse of the cultural landscape also never fails to excite me as I come across the plethora of ideas and themes being pursued by various individuals and groups as depicted in the newspapers and magazines. One evening, recently, I decided to enjoy a cultural product and ended up at the Alliance Francaise to enjoy a performance by Anup Barua. As is customary, or so I am inclined to believe, I reached the venue a few minutes before the programme was to begin. Upon entering the performance hall, the first thing that caught my attention was the sparse attendance. The musicians were chomping at the bits, ready to roll...alas, where was the audience? So we sat there listening to the musicians' tune, retune, fine tune and further tune their instruments to the finest shade of a note; yet no audience!

After about 45 minutes beyond the scheduled start time, the singer decided to begin the performance. After a cursory introduction the programme finally began, much to my appreciation. It was then that the audience began to stream in...during a full-blown performance and a commotion ensued. People were jostling for space, muttering dissatisfaction as others grazed them, coaxing each other

to make space, and even waving animatedly to someone across the hall to catch their attention. Then came the atrocious cacophony of the cell phones accompanied by full scale conversations in hardly muted voices. As if that was not enough, the clinking of china began drifting into my ears in another discordant note: people in the back of the room were ordering tea in the back counter. And tea is never sipped in silence in the Bengali culture when you are with friends.

Needless to elaborate, a wonderful rendition of Nazrul songs along with a smattering of light classical and *purano diner gaan* by a very accomplished artiste was marred by an insensitive subset of the audience that became simply unpalatable.

Several things must be done so that these cultural programmes are not trashed in this unceremonious manner:

1) Being on time would facilitate a smooth programme. Also, since the programme started late, the really interested parties were deprived of additional songs.

2) The tyranny of the cell phones must be stopped. What is an obvious intrusion is disregarded with impunity everywhere...as if nothing is more important than the ridiculous ring-tone and the animated and public conversation! Even in high-profile forums with international guests, I must note

that the cell phones of the locals intrude rather shamelessly. Clearly even the educated and elite of society seem to need an education on cell phone courtesy.

3) The performance hall was also packed much beyond capacity. The stifling and unhealthy room, the rising temperature, and the inability to sit comfortably was getting rather unbearable. There was also a safety issue; if a fire hazard started a stampede, many would be hurt badly.

4) Why tea/coffee would be sold while the artiste is performing at the venue was beyond my comprehension. Surely, this service could be offered during the break or at an outside location.

The culture of attending a cultural programme requires a level of sensitivity that was clearly lacking in the programme I tried to enjoy but failed. If this is the state of cultural appreciation in the country, some form of audience education is imperative ... in discussions, talk shows, and other media forums. While some may disagree with me, vigorously defending the freedoms of the audience in a free country, I would respectfully disagree! What I depicted is uncultured, intrusive, insensitive, and discourteous to the artiste as well as to others in the audience and must change for the better.

The author is Professor and Programme Chair at Penn State Erie.

## Songs of National Poet at Nazrul Institute

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Nazrul Sangeet Shilpi Parishad's monthly programme "Bulbul" was held at Nazrul Institute Auditorium on July 25.

Noted Nazrul singer Ferdous Ara and upcoming singers Julie Sharmili and Nasima Akhter presented popular songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam at the event.

Julie Sharmili started the evening with *Esho esho meghmala*. The upcoming artiste also sang *Chander konya Chand Sultana*, *Gagoney khelay shap* and *Tumi jodi Radha hotey*.

Nasima Akhter rendered *Bulbuli nirob nargis bon-e*, *Akashey aaj chhoriye dilam*, *Hey namazi amar ghorey* and *Pordeshti megh jao re phirey*.

Ferdous Ara performed *Kuhu kuhu koyelia*, *Aye ma Uma rakhbo*



An artiste performs at the programme

*ebar, Chomkey chomkey, Bajey monjori, Pothohara pakhi* and Hindi song written by Nazrul, *Prem nagar*

*ki thikana*. Almas Ali and Sultan accompanied the vocalists on violin and *tabla* respectively.

## Matt Damon sides with Bourne over Bond

Matt Damon's amnesiac assassin Jason Bourne shares initials with another notorious screen operative. But other than that, Damon doesn't see any similarities between Bourne and Bond.

Bond is "an imperialist and he's a misogynist. He kills people and laughs and sips martinis and wise-cracks about it," Damon, 36, told *The Associated Press* in an interview.

Damon's new film, *The Bourne Ultimatum*, opens

August 3.

"Bourne is always paranoid. He's on the run. The government is after him. He's a serial monogamist who's in love with his dead girlfriend and can't stop thinking about her," Damon said. "He's the opposite of James Bond."

The third movie in the series based on Robert Ludlum's books sends Damon's penitent killer back to his roots to uncover how he became such a perfect weapon and who was responsible.

Damon said he bumped into former Bond star Pierce Brosnan in London and they chatted briefly about how the British super-spy's movie handlers were trying to update the character with last fall's *Casino Royale*, which introduced Daniel Craig as Bond.

Brosnan told him the aesthetics and style of Bond can be updated "but fundamentally, the character is something from the 1960s," Damon said.

Paul Greengrass, Damon's director on Universal's *Bourne Ultimatum* and its 2004 predecessor, *The Bourne Supremacy*, agreed that Bond is a relic from a different era.

"He's an insider. He likes being a secret agent. He worships at the altar of technology. He loves his gadgets. And he embodies this whole set of misogynistic values," Greengrass said.

"He likes violence. That's part of the appeal of the character. He has no guilt. He's essentially an imperial adventurer of a particularly English sort."

"Personally, I spit on those values. I think we've moved on a little bit from all that, the martini shaken, not stirred."



Source: The Associated Press

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Talking about discussion series "Shomoy-er Kotha", Syed Munir Khasru, the moderator of the show, says, "When I was approached by BTV authorities to plan an unbiased discussion programme on the current social, political and administrative issues, I had my reservations for a number of reasons. For one, I figured that BTV might censor some of the content. Besides, a major part of the educated, urban TV viewers have been snubbing BTV for years; the popular complaint being that the state-run channel doesn't offer interesting, edgy programmes."

"After airing the first episode that featured an interview with Patricia A. Butenis, the former US ambassador, I was convinced that BTV is going to honour its part of commitment -- not censor contents it may not necessarily agree with or set restrictions," adds Khasru who is a faculty, Institute of Business Administration.

So far five episodes have been aired highlighting issues including "Price Hike of Essentials", "Anti-corruption Drive", "Power Crisis" and more. Noted personalities including Dr. Mutafizur Rahman (research director



The moderator (L) of the show with tonight's guests

of Centre for Policy Dialogue), Dr. Asaduzzaman (research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies), Professor Muzaffer Ahmed (chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh), Major General Shakil Ahmed (director general of BDR), Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud, Dr. Akbar Ali Khan (former advisor to the caretaker government of Bangladesh), A.N.M Rezwana (former PDB chairman), Tawfique-e-Elahi Choudhury (former secretary of the energy division) and Sharier Khan (City editor, *The Daily Star*) have participated in different episodes.

The show planned by Khasru and directed by Abdun Noor Tushar, is aired every Friday at 9pm. Tonight's show will feature a discussion on "election Commission and Political Reform". Dr. Debopriyo Bhattacharjee (executive director, CPD), Dr. A.T.M. Shamsul Huda (chief election commissioner) and Dr. Kamal Hossain have addressed legal, administrative and economic aspects of political reform, the election roadmap, the need to introduce new stream of politics free from black money, dynastic rule and sycophancy in tonight's show.