

In Conversation

"I'll be more regular in releasing albums in Bangladesh" --James



James

ERSHAD KAMOL

FOR his unique rock style, Faruk Mahfuz Anam, popularly known as James has become an icon in Bangladesh. His spontaneity, ability to connect to the audience and psychedelic voice are the keys to his success.

For over the last two decades he has maintained his position as one of the leading rock singer-composers in Bangladesh. The lead vocalist and guitarist of the band 'Nagar Baul', his solo albums are equally popular. James is often referred to as "Nagar Baul", and many of fans adoringly call him

"guru". Following the huge popularity of some playback he has done for Bollywood films, James has also won the admiration of Indian music lovers.

After doing playback for three Hindi movies -- Gangster, Woh Lamhe and Life in a Metro -- recently James has spent a major

share of his time abroad. After a couple of years of eclipse from the rock music arena in Bangladesh, James is going to release a solo Bangla album sometime in the middle of this Ramadan. The title of the album is Tufan. Most of the songs featured in the album are fusion of rock, blues and folk. James is optimistic about the album. In his words, "I was pretty busy in India, particularly in Mumbai. Then I realised that I should also be regular in my own country. Besides, working in India, I'll be more regular in releasing albums in Bangladesh."

How was he received in India? James' response: "They like my music. Renowned Indian producer-director Mahesh Bhatt, director Anurag Basu and music composer Preetam Chakraborty (of the film Gangster) approached me to do a playback for the film. After the song, Bheegi Bheegi, struck gold overnight, I received offers to sing Chal chaley (in the movie Woh Lamhe) and Alvida (in the movie Life in a Metro). These songs have become quite popular in the subcontinent as well. The Music videos are still on air on several music channels. Currently I'm working on a Hindi album in India too."

Sharing his work experience in Mumbai, James said, "They use more expensive, cutting edge equipments than we do here. They

can afford to do that because they have a huge market."

Has he always wanted to be a rockstar? James: "Yes. Since I was a kid. I began playing guitar when I was in class seven. In 1982 my friends and I formed the band 'Feelings'. That's how I stepped into the rock music scene. In the late '90s I formed my own band 'Nagar Baul'."

So far James has released seven solos and several mixed albums. Four albums of his bands are also available in the market. Of these Ananya, Jel Thekey Bolchhi, Palabe Kothaye, Nagar Baul, Dukhni Dukhno Koro Na, Lace Fita Lace, Thik Achney Bondhu and Dushto Chheler Dol are noteworthy.

What is the difference between his approach to solo and band music? James says, "Members of my band perform in my solos too. In that sense, there is not much difference. Usually the band albums are rock-based. I do a lot of experiments with music in the solos."

Recently James has performed at a fusion music concert with Indian classical vocalist Sarathi Chatterjee at the National Theatre Stage, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. Sharing his experience, James says, "We were excited. During the initial stage we were a little confused. After practicing we both enjoyed the performance."

Sabina Yasmin's condition improving



Sabina Yasmin

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Sabina Yasmin's health is improving gradually. Her daughter Bandhon Yasmin has informed, if everything goes well, the artiste should be back in Bangladesh by late October.

Currently the singer is undergoing treatment at Singapore General Hospital. On September 15, doctors gave her chemotherapy for the fifth time. After two weeks in intensive care, the doctors will give her sixth and final chemo and will observe her condition for another two weeks. If everything seems fine, she will come home.

Listening to music and reading books occupies her time in the hospital.

Sabina Yasmin was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (a form of blood cancer) and was admitted in Labaid in mid-June, where she went through tests and surgery by specialists. But as her physical condition got worse she was flown to Singapore for better medical treatment on July 11.

TV Watch

"Shomoyer Kotha" on BTV tonight



Discussants at tonight's programme

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

BTV will air the discussion programme *Shomoyer Kotha* tonight at 9pm. Tonight's episode will feature a discussion on the "New Trends in Bangla Music".

Popular musicians Shafin Ahmed (Miles), Anushah (Bangla), Tahsan and Khaled (G-series) will take part in the discussion. Hosted by Syed Munir Khasru, *Shomoyer Kotha* is aired every Friday.

"Je Meghey Brishti Hoina" on ATN Bangla



A scene from the play

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Written by Arun Choudhury and directed by Chayanir Choudhury, single episode TV play *Je Meghey Brishti Hoina* will be aired tonight, at 8pm on ATN Bangla.

The play follows physically challenged Dipu, who despite being a popular singer, shies away from others and conceals his identity. Rini, an admirer of Dipu's songs, tries to warm up to him. But Dipu pays little attention to her, as he has the least intention of getting involved with anyone. Pasha is Dipu's private secretary and friend. Dipu convinces Pasha to take up his identity and meet Rini. Eventually the two meet

Poetic Licence

Rikshaw art by S.A. Malek

Nivedita Raitz von Frentz

Starting off from humble beginnings, rikshaw artist S.A. Malek is a fairly popular figure in Dhaka, especially among the expat community. This typically Bangladeshi talent can be traced back a couple of generations; Malek's paternal grandfather and father were commercial artists, originally based in Calcutta. His father moved to Dhaka before independence and Malek was born in 1969 in Madhab Pasha village in Narayanganj district. Funny enough, he continues to live there, village life being more appealing than the bright lights of Dhaka.

School did not appeal to the young Malek, so he became his father's apprentice in his early teens. As far as Malek can recall, it all began about thirty years ago

when his father's shop in Narinda, old Dhaka, attracted the attention of some members of the diplomatic community, and he was established as a rikshaw artist. This reputation was not automatically transferred to his son; it has not been an easy ride for Malek. "There are no exceptions to the types of art I'll put my hand to; I'm willing to try all forms of painting," he is proud of his versatility. He initially painted billboards, banners and screens. Rikshaw boards and backrests soon followed; these were sold in old Dhaka's Bongshah market. He also specialised in baby taxi body-work at his shop Jamuna Auto Centre in Mogh Bazaar.

For five long years, he concentrated on and mastered different forms of rikshaw art. Malek was "discovered" by an Icelandic diplomat roughly ten years ago. "I did a

lot of work for him" he said, referring to a photo of a car covered in rikshaw art. This was his entry into Dhaka's expat world, introduced through the Icelander's friends' circle. It was only a matter of time before demand for Malek's artwork was on the up, and all this by word of mouth. Nearly a quarter of a century later, he's never looked back. Malek's days of baby taxi painting are behind him now.

For the commissioned rikshaw paintings, the starting point is a photograph. His preferred medium is enamel ("There's more glamour in enamel than there is in oil"). The painting is usually done on tin, which is first given a white background. Malek then sketches directly on the tin and fills in the background. The paint tends to dry quite quickly, he revealed. The likeness to the original photo is

quite amazing. The composition of the painting depends on his client, though most tend to leave it up to him. There could be a myriad backgrounds and subjects, but Malek's favourite motifs are rural scenes, monkeys, tigers, colourful birds, mango trees, boats, and of course, rikshaws! His subjects could be seated on a rikshaw, dressed in Bangladeshi wedding finery, jogging alongside tigers or taking a boat ride on the Balu River. The use of typical Bangladeshi themes is very apparent, making the paintings vibrant and eye-catching. Apart from rikshaw paintings, Malek also does rikshaw boards, backrests, tin trunks and toy chests. The paintings and trunks are of varying sizes and take a couple of weeks to complete, while four to five rikshaw boards get done in a day.

His love for village life is the impetus for Malek's travelling around the countryside. Often, this results in oil on canvas paintings of pastoral scenes, painted from memory; "I use my heart as a camera", he declared. While his rikshaw paintings are popular mostly with expats, his oils are primarily preferred by Bangladeshi clients. He has dabbled with watercolours and even done figurative painting in and on buildings in Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj. He has also had to resort to calendar work in leaner times.

Malek has had moderate success through exhibitions. In October 1999, the Alliance Francaise held an exhibition of several rikshaw artists, including Malek's father and many of his apprentices, in an attempt to promote rikshaw art as a form of folk art. More recently in 2000, Malek was invited to participate in the Dhaka German Embassy's 50th anniversary celebrations, which included a group show featuring different artists. Given the German nature of the theme, Malek came up with caricatures of two classic German brands Lufthansa and Mercedes Benz! His paintings were subsequently incorporated into a calendar commissioned by the German Embassy.

It is with an almost resigned air that Malek says that those involved in rikshaw art aren't seriously considered as "artists". His greatest wish would be to create an awareness of his art form within his own country to begin with, and then to be able to promote it elsewhere. Does life imitate art, or is it the other way around? Certainly, Malek's paintings are a good imitation of life in the rikshaw lane.

The writer is a freelance contributor



Artworks by S.A. Malek



3rd Citycell-Channel i Music Awards to be held soon

A press conference was held on September 19, to discuss the upcoming Citycell-Channel i music awards, says a press release.

Ananda Rajshinham, marketing

Singers, musicians and techni-

cians will be awarded in 16 categories including lifetime achievement award. The categories are: classical (instrumental), classical (vocal), Rabindra sangeet, Nazrul sangeet, folk (*Palli Geeti* and *Marami*), film songs, modern songs, band songs, lyricist, music director, debut singer (male and female), cover designer (album), music video, sound engineer and underground band.

The entire event is divided into three parts, primary selection, second selection and final selection. To make the event impartial, the covers, tags and artistes' identities will be concealed before presenting them to the jury board. The jury panels will include prominent music exponents.

Separate viewers' awards will be introduced in this year's event. Awards will be given in four categories, best band, best music video, best modern song and best film song. The exciting final round will be launched with a dazzling event in December 2007.

Roping in two newcomers for a major project after having worked with the superstars like

Buzz

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's upcoming film "Saawariya"

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

After the major national and international success of *Devdas* and *Black*, Bollywood director Sanjay Leela Bhansali is back with his latest film *Saawariya*, a love story, which is to be released on November 9.

Saawariya, based on Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky's *White Nights*, is the first Hollywood co-production in India, made by Sony Pictures at an estimated cost of Rs 40 to 50 crore.

Featuring Bollywood's two most talked-about fresh faces - Ranbir Kapoor, son of actor Rishi Kapoor, and Sonam, daughter of actor Anil Kapoor -- Bhansali's latest flick retains the trademark qualities of all his previous features -- unbridled romance, expensive and elaborate sets, drama and music with popular appeal.

Roping in two newcomers for a major project after having worked with the superstars like



A scene from Saawariya

Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aishwarya Rai and Madhuri Dixit, is no doubt a challenge for Bhansali.

But the director says he has found it a pleasure to work with Ranbir and Sonam, both of whom had worked as his assistants in *Black*, starring Amitabh Bachchan and Rani Mukherjee. The film earned Bachchan a National Award for Best Actor last year.

"Ranbir and Sonam exude a lot of charisma that they are born with and they have a new approach to everything", Bhansali told *The Times of India*.

After having worked with some of the top stars in Hindi cinema, Bhansali said he needed "something to excite me to keep me going".

The songs of the movie, which were launched recently, are reportedly turning to be hits and that should be good news to both veteran lyricist Sameer,

who is working with Bhansali for the first time in a movie, and debutant music director Monty Sharma.

Saawariya will be released almost at the same time as another Bollywood extravaganza -- director Farah Khan's second venture *Om Shanti Om*, starring Shah Rukh Khan and debutant Deepika Padukone.

Realising that it will be a tough task to lure viewers from Shah Rukh Khan's forthcoming film, makers of *Saawariya* have reportedly put in a lot of money in ramping up the pre-release publicity blitz. For that, the trailer of the film has been made as teasing as possible, Bollywood analysts say.

The question in Bollywood is will *Saawariya* be able to do for Ranbir and Sonam what Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* had done for newcomers Rishi Kapoor and Dimple Kapadia in the early '70s?



Ananda Rajshinham (2-L) and Faridur Reza Shagar with others at the press conference