



music marriage or just an affair?

"THE music business was not safe, but it was FUN. It was like falling in love with a woman you know is bad for you, but you love every minute with her, anyway."

-Lionel Richie

Music as a career. The very idea seems kind of alien, right? After all, here it's still pretty much a taboo issue, especially if you're coming from an average, well-to-do, middle-class family. The so-called 'bhalo-ghorer-chele-meyera-eshob-korena' syndrome is paramount in our society. As one friend joked: "I'd probably have to kiss getting married goodbye if my biodata said 'musician' instead of 'software engineer'".

Ironically, most of the musicians I know all had their moms initiating them into the wee world of music. Tanvir Alam, aka Shawjeb of 'Chaka' fame, enthused, "Parents' interest matter a lot. Yes, it's true that you need a god-gifted talent first. But then when one's parents recognise that gift and try to nurture it, that's when the whole story begins. But for the story to keep on being told, you yourself must have the realisation of what a precious gift you've been given and then nurture it. Not at your parent's prodding."

However, no parent really wants to encourage their kids to take up music as their sole profession. Parents would rather have doctors or engineers in the family. And their fears have solid grounds. Almost every single musician, be it teens in underground bands or seasoned veterans, had to say the same thing about Bangladesh's music industry. "We need major reforms or else reality bites way too hard."

Ali, who is ReBORN's vocalist, expressed, "Most artists, especially the new entrants and non-commercial ones, are being taken advantage of by major labels. Career wise it's a bad lookout for musicians here who don't want to make commercial music...like us, for instance. International exposure, at least in Calcutta, would be great but the music

labels here don't even do a proper job of promoting your music across your own country, forget distant shores."

Although having a very musical family to help encourage and support him, independent producer/vocalist/lyricist and CEO of Bengal Music, Shayan Chowdhury aka Arnob, has worked hard at making a successful career for himself. He explained "Music as a career is hard. Unless you've the grit to sacrifice a lot of things, I'd advice that you have a separate professional career and do music on the side. Otherwise it doesn't pay. You have to survive by doing jingles, drama/movie scores, etc. Just doing albums won't be enough even if you're concentrating only on profit-oriented commercial music. The earnings hardly outweigh the costs. Suppose one wants to work with musicians outside. Who'll bear the traveling expenses? Exchanging files over the net is all very good but it's WAY different than creating music together inside a studio. It's just not financially feasible for most people."

He and other musicians also expressed their wish for a union or government body who'd implement legal issues dealing with standard pricing, intellectual copyrights, and especially royalties. Aronnya's guitarist/lyricist/vocalist Dipto pointed out, "The radio channels are playing our songs, there are midis, ringtones being made by telecom companies, websites are giving away our stuff for free downloads...yes, we're grateful because that's all helping to contribute to our fame but what about our share of the fortune?"

Arnob, Dipto and other musicians also stressed that fact that music education needs to see major forefronts. Arnob explained "Chayanat or Dhaka University's *Shangeet O Nattokola* are good but teaches only the basics of Eastern music. That starts you off well enough but then what? Music is a process of continuous learning. The whole process of becoming a better musician is a series of 'aha!' experiences.

It's not gradual, or steady, or step-wise. And the more you learn the more you can experiment. You need to go on learning your whole life and it doesn't end with just learning how to sing a particular type of song or playing a certain type of instrument. You need to learn the harmonics of music. The history of music. The different *raags* in Eastern music. You need to appreciate art in every form, not just in terms of music. Otherwise you can't think out of the box."

Triloy's keyboardist, Apu suggested, how it would be wonderful to have people teaching music under one roof - a proper institution so to speak. "For that to happen, someone needs to take the initiative to assemble the human resources and other assets required. The lack of good teachers is a major barrier. We don't really have people in our country who can teach Western music and the respective instruments like the piano, the violin, the sax, the clarinet, etc. professionally. And I seriously wish someone would think of introducing music as a subject in the primary and secondary schools. I mean just think it's been scientifically proven that instrumental music enhances one's mathematical skills and intelligence levels. That should be an incentive in itself!"

But is the picture all bleak? If that were the case, why are more and more people trying to enter the industry? Isn't the mirror always supposed to have two faces?

Well, one positive trend we're seeing now is the amount of opportunities and resources available to pursue musical ambitions. There's easier access to musical instruments and equipment. And instead of scouring for old hand-me-down music magazines, you have the net to do anything from downloading guitar tabs, to advancing your musical knowledge, to promoting your music. Recently I opened my own music page on Myspace, which is brilliant for generating interest - people can hear your music all over the world at the touch of a button and it's a good way of

letting people know about your gigs.

Ashiq of RaaGa also mentioned how the advent of music channels like MTV and Vh1 was not only exposing people to different genres of music but was preventing the yesteryears' trend of 'copying' music. He stated, "Inadvertently this forces you to explore your own talent and make something from scratch. You grow more."

And these days regular gigs like "Friday 6 PM KOZMO (A)live" at KOZMO Lounge and "Wireless Sessions" at Decagon Café are also helping to create a platform for budding musicians to showcase their talents.

And if you can turn your back on all the social shackles during the initial stages of your struggle and become a rockstar... well, the society then runs after you. And a career in music doesn't necessarily mean you have to do albums. There are many session artists who're earning around 1 lakh taka per month just by playing in gigs or working on albums with music producers and artists. That's big money.

It's like how Mr. Richie put it above. Here's a situation where you fall passionately in love with a woman, who's a tad dangerous but oh so addictive. Who knows? If all goes well, you could just end up marrying her after all and live happily ever after.

By Simin Saifuddin
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Note: the write-up sheds light on the neo-generation musical talents and the emergence of Gen-Y band music. However, the photo purports to give a slightly different flavour. We are going completely raw and rural, with snapshots from the baul mela in Bottola Sirajdikhan, Munshigang. All the more to illustrate the diversity in our musical culture.

