

The life and times of a mime maestro

In conversation with Partha Pratim Majumder

ERSHAD KAMOL

PARTHA Pratim Majumder is undoubtedly a forerunner in the field of mime in Bangladesh. Partha spans the western and oriental mime traditions and seeks ways in which these can grow on each other to create new forms of artistic expression which transcend cultural barriers. Partha travels all over the world to teach the art of mime, organises workshops with young people and creates productions with the attendees. He also teaches mime to individuals with speech impairments.

Partha is the torchbearer of the universal mime, developed by legendary French mime artiste Marcel Marceau, blending western corporeal mime and pantomime with oriental Chinese Opera, Japanese traditional Kabuki and Noh and Indian Kathakali performing art forms. Partha's artistic excellence has unfolded during the last two decades at both home and abroad -- Europe and North America. His devotion and sensitivity uplift an ordinary theme to a sublime height.

Partha has been living in Paris for over last two decades. The mime maestro is currently in town upon an invitation of Bangladesh Lung Foundation to perform at the 1st International Conference on Lung Health (to be held from February 20 to 22 at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre). Moreover, Partha will conduct several workshops on mime for the theatre actors and models. The artiste recently spoke with *The Daily Star*.

Partha was born in an artistically inclined family in Pabna in 1954. He trained in Jogesh Dutta's Mime Academy in Calcutta from 1966 to 1972. Coming back to Dhaka, he enrolled at the Government Music



Partha Pratim Majumder

College.

In the '70s Partha used to perform mime and render songs at different programmes, which earned him popularity. At the same time he joined theatre troupe Drama Circle. In the early '80s he got his chance to study mime in Europe.

According to Partha, "Watching my performances on stage and TV, the then French Ambassador to Bangladesh offered me a scholarship to study mime in Paris. It was the first scholarship on mime offered in an Asian country. In 1981 I moved to Paris to study mime with Etienne Decroux. While studying under Decroux, I was introduced to the legendary French mime artiste Marcel Marceau. Marceau offered to train me. From 1982 to 1985 I studied at Marceau's mime school and became a member of his tour-

ing company."

"Marceau treated me as his favourite disciple and friend. Together we had performed in many shows. He used to introduce me as 'the bridge between orient and occident'. Since the mid-'80s I have performed solo and company performances throughout Europe and in the United States, Malaysia and Bangladesh. Moreover, I have acted in films and commercials," said Partha.

Commenting on his secret behind success as a mime artiste, Partha said, "My keen sense of music and rhythm enabled me to let my limbs move and express my surroundings through gestures."

Partha wrote and choreographed a mimodrama titled *The Nightmare*, in a record time of two months, which was staged in Bangladesh in 1994. This was achieved

with the collaboration of different theatre groups and professional dancers from Dhaka. The mimodrama concerning child abuse was the first of its kind to be staged in South Asian and its success was acclaimed.

In 1986 Partha performed a solo at the UNESCO Headquarter in Paris. The show, *Boatman of Padma*, was the first mime presentation at the UNESCO Headquarter and a houseful audience enjoyed the show."

For his contribution to mime, Partha Pratim Majumder has been honoured with awards and titles including 'Master of Mime' from the Mime Institute of India (1987), 'Master of the World' from France (1987), 'Millennium Award' from England and Fobana 2000 Award.

1st International Children's Film Festival

Braving the biting cold children flock at the venue

NADIA SARWAT

Titled *Future in Frames*, the 1st International Film Festival opens a new window for the children to realise their dreams through cinema.

From the very first day (January 28) of the festival, an increasing interest among the children, as well as the grown ups, is noticed. Despite the chilly weather, four-year-old Rubai came to the Central Public Library with his parents to see his favourite *Sisimpur* on the big screen.

In the festival, 134 films from 37 countries, including Bangladesh films, are being screened. Films being screened today are *Life Like Smoke and Young Labours* (Bangladesh), *Gupi Gain Bagha Bain and Kabuliwala* (India), *Sticky Feet* (Netherlands), *Lbola* (Spain), *Dancing Darlings* (Germany) and *The Kid* (USA) at the Shawkat Osman Auditorium. Films will be screened at the other venues of the festival as well. A workshop for children also starts from today.

"It is heartening to see children come and watch the movies at the festival. We have special arrangements for the school-goers and students of some schools in Dhaka and other districts came along with their teachers. But what disappointed us is the response of the corporate giants who could have easily sponsored the event. Even organisations like UNICEF and Save the Children disappointed us," festival director Morshedul Islam said.

One hundred child delegates

who have been selected through an essay competition held prior to the festival, had the opportunity to meet noted educationist Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed and Professor Muzaffar Ahmed on January 29 and 30 respectively. The children shared their feelings and expectations about the films with the guests. Advocate Sultana Kamal will meet the child delegates on February 2. Among the child delegates, some are the volunteers also.

The festival organisers did not forget the differently-abled or the under privileged children either. Twenty differently-abled children are included as child delegates. With the help of organisations that work for street children and working children, like Aporajeyo Bangla, Manusher Jonyo, Ain-O-Shalish Kendra, the festival committee also made some arrangements for the under privileged children to watch the movies.

"We want to include all the children. Children in our country are deprived of experiencing their own culture and traditions through films. Unfortunately, very few films have been made for children in our country. The main reason is the lack of government support for making children's films. We hope that successful completion of this festival will inspire parents and policy makers in the country," the festival director hoped.



Young film enthusiasts at the festival

PHOTO: STAR

Asha: Images of Hope

In conversation with Heather Pillar

NIVEDITA RAITZ VON FRENTZ

Heather Pillar started taking photographs while studying for a post-graduate degree in Sociology and Women's Studies at Brandeis University, USA. Professional photography not being conducive to family life, she opted for a change in lifestyle. Teaching abroad appealed to her and having secured jobs at the Taipei American School, she and her husband embarked on their overseas journey. During her stint at the school, Heather conceived and ran a substantive photography course. Choosing to make the transition to the classroom, Heather specialised in elementary level teaching, which eventually brought her to the American International School, Dhaka (AIS/D) in 2005.

Involved in a long-term "Welfare Recipients" project concerning mothers and children from poor families in the US, working with people from underprivileged backgrounds is not new to Heather. Her photography roots stuck firm all through the years and she put them to good use recently, contributing her skills and time to a photo-book entitled *Asha (Hope) -- For Bangladeshi Girls and Their Future*. The book focuses on ten girls attending the ABC (Assisting Bangladeshi Children) School, all proceeds destined for donation.

AIS/D and ABC go back a long way. Started in 2001 as a follow up to AIS/D teacher Eglar Rousseau's initiative to feed and provide other basic services to a band of street children, the school has expanded beyond



A photograph from *Asha*, the book by Heather Pillar, Julia Alden and Nora Graham

recognition. Essentially, it provides for children who have never had an opportunity to receive formal education. Emphasis is placed on stable homes, parental commitment being a strong ABC criterion. Located in Bashundhara, it caters for 50 students, from KG through Grade 4, with an aspiration to go all the way to Grade 10.

Expansion plans don't come cheaply; an estimated USD 150,000 is needed for upgrading. In an effort to raise funds to achieve this end, Julia Alden, erstwhile AIS/D elementary school principal and ABC board member, came up with the idea

for the book, undertaking all printing costs and recruiting Heather to take the marvellous photos contained therein. Art teacher Nora Graham completed the trio. Julia sought to concentrate on coming-of-age girl students, between the ages of 10 and 13, en route to the next educational step. The team is deeply indebted to Augustine Biswas, who has been intricately linked with ABC since its inception, and whose valuable support was essential to the book.

The project took three months' intensive work to complete and the book went on sale late last year. "It was a solid first

effort and we worked well as a team."

The pictures chart the girls' daily routines, their living conditions, their parents (mostly manual labourers), their hopes, dreams and aspirations. The girls were given copies of the photos. "They loved looking at themselves; it was a simple, yet effective way for me to connect with them." Heather firmly believes that "girls' choices are very limited without education. Children automatically gain access to opportunities, securing a somewhat brighter future."

The writer is a freelance contributor

Blast from the past

Classic films to be aired on BTV



Sumita Devi and co-actor in *Aasia*



Razzaq and Shuchanda in *Jibon Thekey Neyra*

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

BTV will telecast a choice selection of classic films from the collection of the Film Archive of Bangladesh every Saturday.

The series began with *Shutorang*, directed by Soovas Dutta, on January 26. *Kokhono Asheni*, Zahir Raihan's directorial debut, will be aired on February 2. This will be followed by *Nadi O Nari*

produced by Sadek Khan, *Kancher Deyal* by Zahir Raihan, *Dharapat* by Salahuddin, *Aaina O Oboshisho* by Soovas Dutta, *Shaat Bhai Champa* by Khan Ataur Rahman and *Shurjo Dighal Bari* by Sheikh Neamat Ali and Masiuddin Shaker.

Meanwhile as part of their Friday movie hour programme, *Dheeray Bohey Meghna* by Alamgir Kabir, *Arunodoy-er Agnishakkhi* by Soovas Dutta, *Sirajuddaula* by

Khan Ataur Rahman, *Alor Michhil* by Narayan Ghosh Mita, *Agun-er Poroshmoni* by Humayun Ahmed and *Aasia* by Fateh Lohani will be aired.

Set up in 1978, the Film Archive stores most of the treasures of our film history. The collection includes the first silent short film produced in Dhaka, *Sukumari* (1927-28); *Mukh O Mukhosh*, the first Bangla feature film (1956); a

print of the first film produced at FDC, *Aasia* and a reel of the film *Dhrubo* in which Kazi Nazrul Islam made a cameo as Narad.

Jeebon Thekey Neyra, directed by Zahir Raihan, will be aired after the live broadcast of the opening speech by Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government, Fakhruddin Ahmed, at the inauguration of the Ekushey Book Fair today.

Channel Click

"Madhur Jhamela" on ATN Bangla tonight

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Madhur Jhamela will be aired tonight on ATN Bangla at 8pm.

Directed by Shahiduzzaman Selim and written by Limton, *Madhur Jhamela* features odd situa-

tions arising in a family. An elderly man Jummon, his short-tempered wife, a spineless son and a cunning grandson are the members of the family.

The cast includes Masud Ali Khan, Dilara Zaman, Mir Sabbir and Tisha.



Masud Ali Khan and Dilara Zaman in *Madhur Jhamela*

Saif Ali Khan in a new avatar

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan is nowadays making more news off the screen -- on the stage as the lead guitarist of a rock group.

Recently, he performed for the popular band 'Parikrama' in Mumbai and among the audience were his two children -- daughter Sara, who was seen cheering her father in his new role, and son Ibrahim clicking away the daddy with a camera.

Leaving behind his illness which saw him spending some days in a hospital and break-up of ties with Amrita and Rozza last year, Khan is doing rock concerts with Parikrama across the country and he says he is enjoying it.

The actor says he took fancy to guitar when he was a teenager and he got hooked on to it two years ago while participating in a concert for Parikrama.

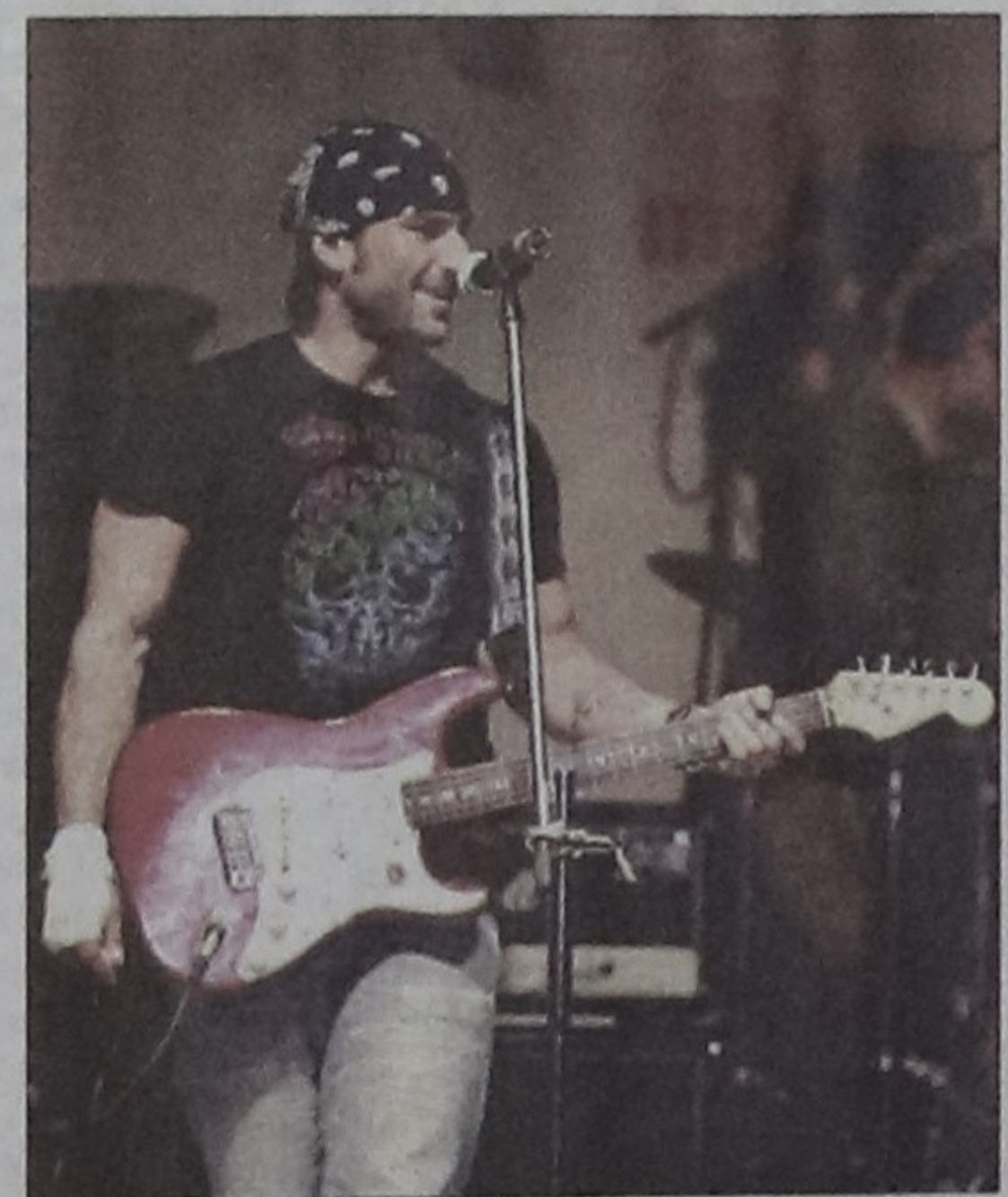
Among Khan's favourite rock bands are Pink Floyd, Deep Purple, AC/DC and The Doors. Parikrama has been doing covers of some of their numbers.

From a film star to a rock star -- Khan finds a little of Bollywood in his new role because he says all great music directors in the Hindi film industry from A R Rahman and Shankar, Ehsan and Loy have used rock music.

However, if fans think that rock music is going to rock Khan's celluloid boat, they are mistaken. He is going to appear in his home production of a film to be directed by Imtiaz Ali known for movies like *Socha Na Tha* and *Jab We Met*.

On the personal life front, Khan refuses to be

drawn into his new-found relationship with actress Kareena Kapoor although he has admitted to it. He is peeved at the media for repeatedly asking questions on the subject.



Saif Ali Khan

Buzz

Madonna turns film director

Yet another actor turning director, Madonna -- who vacationed in India recently -- is going to follow in husband Guy Ritchie's ways with a 30-minute short film called *Fifth And Wisdom*.

Ritchie, who broke through with snappy gangster movies *Lock Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*, lost his way when he made the ill-fated *Swept Away*, starring Madge in the lead.

Then followed another disaster, called *Revolver*. Ritchie is now directing another gangland film, called *RockNRolla*, a film he hopes will be better than his last two turkeys.

Can his wife do better? Well, lets just say its a good thing she's starting with a short.



Madonna

Source: Internet