

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Nazrul Birth Anniversary

Celebrations at Dhaka, Trishal, Comilla, Daulatpur and Chittagong
Organiser: Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Date: May 25. Time: 9:30am onwards. In Dhaka the programme will be held at the Osmani Memorial Hall



Nazrul Birth Anniversary Celebration

Organiser: Chhayanaat
Venue: Shawkat Osman Auditorium, Central Public Library, Shahbag
Date: May 28
Time: 7pm



16th Young Artists' Art Exhibition 2008

Venue: National Art Gallery, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Date: May 18-June 6
Time: 11am-7pm (3pm-7pm Fridays)



Solo Painting Exhibition

Title: The Dance of Life on the Horizon
Artist: Mahmudul Haque
Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, H 285/F, R 27 (old), Dhanmondi
Date: May 16-30
Time: 12pm-8pm



An introduction to Sri Lankan rhythm and dance

Cultural programme by Seva Vanitha-Dhaka



Performers of the Sri Lanka Army Dance Troupe at the programme

KARIM WAHEED

Bangladeshis are not that familiar with Sri Lankan culture -- dance, music, traditions and such -- despite the latter being a neighbour and a SAARC member.

Thanks to the Dhaka wing of Seva Vanitha -- a non-profit, non-political organisation -- and the High Commission of Sri Lanka in Dhaka, traditional Sri Lankan dance made its first appearance in the city on May 22. The event titled "Lakrangana", featuring performances by the dance troupe of Sri Lanka Army, was held at the Grand Ballroom, Radisson Water Garden Hotel. The show was sponsored by ABN Group.

Apart from offering a novel cultural experience, the programme was held for a charitable purpose -- proceeds from

ticket sales went to the Dhaka Ahsania Mission Cancer and General Hospital.

In her speech, Rajes Krishnamoorthy, president of Seva Vanitha-Dhaka spoke briefly about the organisation and the cultural programme. She said, "Seva Vanitha was founded in Sri Lanka in 1983 to promote and enable women to participate in national development programmes. The Dhaka unit of the organisation consists of female staff members, spouses of staff members of the Sri Lanka High Commission and Sri Lankan expats (women) in Bangladesh.

"This cultural programme, Lakrangana, also commemorates the 60th anniversary of Sri Lankan Independence."

Chief guest Nicole S. Chowdhury, wife of Adviser to

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury, said, "Sharing one's art with others has a way of bonding people of different nations, bridging the gaps of isolation and linking them by a sense of participation and friendship.

"In the vast Asian tapestry, adorned by diverse and colourful traditions, we, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, are etched partners sharing common threads of a vibrant heritage."

The programme was well attended by foreign delegates, including the Sri Lanka High Commissioner, V Krishnamoorthy.

Dr. Silverine De Silva, a member of Seva Vanitha-Dhaka, was the MC.

The origin of Sri Lankan dances goes back to indigenous tribes and Yakkas (demon wor-

shippers). According to Sinhalese legend, Kandyan (Kandy was the last royal capital of Sri Lanka) dances originated about 2500 years ago, from a ritual that broke the spell cast on a king.

The classical dance forms are associated with rituals and ceremonies originating from folk traditions going back to times before the advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.E.

The Sri Lankan troupe began with *Magul Bera* (ceremonial drums). According to customs, every auspicious occasion is heralded by *Magul Bera*, to invoke divine blessing.

Next was *Puja Netuma*, performed as homage to Sarasvathi, the goddess of arts. The dance is a fusion of low and up country styles.

A performance of *Naga*

Raksha dance followed. The performance was a stage adaptation of a ritualistic dance form from the southern part of Sri Lanka. The ritual was intended to bridge the gap between the human world and that of the gods and demons. The dancer in crimson, wearing a mask -- a huge snake head with seven hoods -- started with subtle movements and gradually, as the beats of the drums picked up, swirled and twirled as if he was possessed by some force from the nether world.

The next performance, *Gajaga Vannama*, depicted the rhythmic, majestic tread of an elephant. *Hansa Vannama* -- a Sri Lankan "swan dance" -- featured graceful movements with fitting rhythm.

The drummers were highlighted in *Pancha Thuirya*

Vadanaya (the drum orchestra). The drum has been the king of instruments and 20 types of drums are used in Sri Lanka. The performance featured *Atata* (playing drums with hands); *Vithatha* (playing drums with sticks); *Atata-Vithatha* (using hand and stick); *Ghanya* (instruments made of metal) and *Shushira* (wide instruments like flute or the Sri Lankan trumpet, *horanewa*).

The dances, rhythm, instruments, costumes were all new to the Bangladeshi audience; performances were greeted with enthusiastic applause.

The second performance of *Lakrangana* was held yesterday at the International School Dhaka auditorium. *Lakrangana* will be staged at the Chittagong Club auditorium today.

Film Screening at IFA

Documentaries by Bengal Foundation

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

To preserve the heritage of fine arts, Bengal Foundation has taken an initiative and as part of that, the organisation has already made twenty documentaries on eminent artists of the country. Screening of the documentaries began at the department of Print-making, Institute of Fine Arts, DU on May 20.

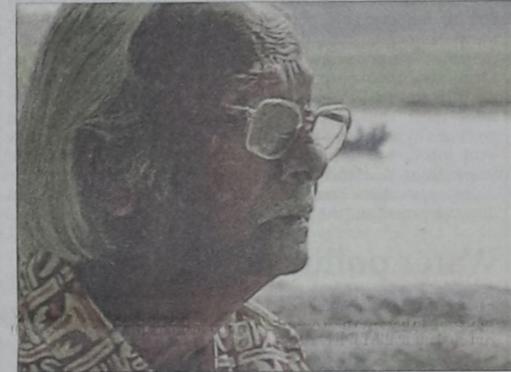
Life and works of artists Qayyum Chowdhury, Rafiqun Nabi, Murtaja Baseer, Hashem Khan, Swapan Chowdhury, Rokeya Sultana, Farida Zaman and Ifat Ara Dewan as well as some art camps are highlighted in the documentaries.

On the first day (May 20), three documentaries -- *Through the Other Window* (highlighting the first workshop by Bengal Foundation titled "Contemporary Works of Bengali Artists" held in 1999, directed by

Parvez Chowdhury); *Shilper Swajan* (directed by Mahub Alam Pallab featuring life and works of artist Mahmudul Haque) and *Shudurer Pathik* (directed by Fahmida Akhter Munni featuring artist Rokeya Sultana) -- were screened.

On the second day (May 21) -- *Art Junction* (directed by Mahub Alam Pallab featuring the workshop titled "Contemporary Asian Art 2002"); *Murtaja Baseer: 55 Years of Artistic Endeavour, A Landscape Painter* (on artist Qayyum Chowdhury); *Jol Godhuli* (on artist Farida Zaman) and *Smritir Thikana* (on artist Rafiqun Nabi) -- were screened.

Between May 20 and yesterday, seven more documentaries were screened. Bengal Foundation is also working on a documentary on artist Aminul Islam and on the influences of Liberation War and folk elements in arts.



Stills from *A Landscape Painter* (top) and *Smritir Thikana*



"Shayaner Gaan": A breakthrough album



Shayan during a performance

MUNEERA PARBEEN

Every artiste has (or should have) a unique style of presentation. Listening to the album, *Shayaner Gaan* -- the artiste with her powerful voice, uttering the edgy words with so much ease and emotions -- almost makes you feel as if she is singing to you, for you, narrating your personal stories.

And that is what makes Shayan's songs so endearing.

Added to this is her voice with its deep timbre. The lyrics -- emanating razor sharp wit and utmost sensitivity -- are complemented by her distinct melody. The songs will make you want to put everything on hold and listen to her. She pleads, ignites senses and flirts with her vocals. The accompaniment -- though meticulously played out

often becomes almost irrelevant as her voice has that enchanting quality to possess the listener's senses and transport him/her to a different place and time.

For a few moments you might think you have been transported to a different era, a golden period when instruments didn't have to carry the weight of a song. Shayan's voice is her signature as much as her words are.

Her full name is Farzana Wahid. She has never received institutional training in music, but was encouraged to sing. Her family appreciates music and has always encouraged Shayan to sing at family gatherings.

As a young girl Shayan would watch in awe as her mother took music lessons. She picked up as she watched her mother.

It is necessary to listen to an array of songs to appreciate music. Since childhood, Shayan has been immersed in good music

that developed her senses and creativity. As she grew older, Shayan started writing and composing songs. She wanted to reach out to people with her songs and that's how the idea of an album came up.

Like Nachiketa, Sumon or Moushumi Bhowmik, Shayan's music is lyric-centric, which is a rarity these days.

All songs in her debut album, aptly titled *Shayaner Gaan*, have been written by her. The subjects and very relevant, topical and at times politically conscious. She sings about people, dreams, homes, the country, personal and public struggles, narrow-mindedness, music piracy and human endurance.

There are interesting stories behind most of the songs. She got inspired to write the song *Ami tajjob boneyai* when one night she watched a man sleeping on the street across her house. She wondered at his homelessness and simultaneously marvelled at a little bird, which had built its own nest at a corner of her home. The song beautifully articulates the disparity.

Du chokh diyel dekho talks about the futile debate of the pundits on who is greater -- Tagore or Nazrul -- and the consequences of it on our arts.

Ekhanei shukh chhilo ekin is a touching song on separation/divorce. The artiste goes over the inanimate objects that evoke bitter-sweet memories of better days when love lived in the nest.

Janatar Beyadabi goes over the politics that victimises the common man.

Other songs included in the album are: *Shopner doinnyo*, *Ami Bangladesh* and *Gaan-paapi*.

This album is certainly something to remember.

Shayaner Gaan has been produced by Gaan Poka.

The writer is a sub-editor, The Daily Star

Dr. Noazesh's projection of "Dhanshiri Nadi"

FAYZA HAQ

Dr. Noazesh Ahmed talking about his latest creation, *Dhanshiri Nadi*, based on the poetry of Jibanananda Das, says, "In my film I presented the poet's *Dhanshiri Nodir Tirey*. I took 22 of his poems and illustrated them through photography. In the video clips, included in the presentation, I've used natural sounds, such as that of the birds, moving wind and water lapping.

The 45-minute presentation was screened at Chhayanaat Sanskriti Bhaban, accompanied with recitation by Bhashwar Bandyopadhyay. The movie is fitted in between the poetry and dissolves into still scenes." There is also an English version to this.

Dr. Noazesh Ahmed has used Jibanananda Das' lines from *Ruposhi Bangla*, *Banalata Sen*, *Jhara Palok*, *Dhushor Pandulipi* etc. According



Suddenly the moon comes out of the darkness (top), I have seen the face of Bengal (bottom-left)

to Buddha Dev Bose, Jibanananda Das was like the Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, who entered the depths of nature. His expressions like *Akash chhoriey achhey akashey akashey* and *Chul taar kobeykaar andhokar bidishar nisha*, *mukhtar Srabostir karukarjo* were inimitable, says Dr. Ahmed. "One has to think seriously about these surrealistic images," he says.

Jibanananda Das' world is quiet and dreamy. The few characters in them like Banalata Sen and Aranima Sanyal remain in darkness, says Dr. Ahmed. The poet includes historical elements shrouded in mystery. Srabosti was an ancient city in India. He brings in drowning sailors and cinnamon Islands. Jibanananda Das had a universal vision and used fascinating romantic images, says Dr. Ahmed. "In his highly individualistic poems one sees the surrealism of Yeats and the mysticism of T.S. Eliot," he adds.

Das' Dhanshiri and Jalshiri rivers are purely imaginary. "I tried to catch the poetic phrases through still photography and this was quite difficult. The DVD production was to break the tedium of stillness. This was appreciated in

Kolkata, where cinematographers like Gautam Ghosh, Aparna Sen and Nimai Ghosh were in the audience. Cinematographers sometimes use stills in their movies: This was just the opposite," says Dr. Ahmed. "Again, as I mentioned, I used background recitations and natural sounds from time to time. In Jibanananda Das' concept, birds and kites played significant roles. They recur in every poem," says Dr. Ahmed.

Comparing *Dhanshiri* with *Chhinno Patra*, Dr. Ahmed says that on *Dhanshiri* he spent more time and it is more creative because it contains both still pictures and movie extracts. The Tagore creation was easier as the writer had already given the text in prose and Dr. Ahmed simply followed his world with its people. Jibanananda Das, on the other hand, is strictly a poet of nature and Dr. Ahmed had to go deep into nature and be careful with his selection of nature and human faces. He had to depict the rivers in the way the poet saw the Dhanshiri and Jalshiri. The uncommon poignant sounds of the birds had to be brought in. Even the names of the insects mentioned in the poems are unusual.