

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Theatre
Play: Lower Depth
Troupe: Department of
Theatre and Music
Venue: Natmandol,
University of Dhaka
Date: May 25-31 at 07:00
pm



Theatre
Play: Khona
Troupe: Shubachan Natya
Sangsad
Venue: Experimental
Theatre Stage
Date: May 26 at 07:00 pm



Film Screening
2nd session of African Film
Festival '08
Films: 20 documentaries by
African filmmakers
Organiser: Zahir Ralhan Film
Society
Venue: Alliance Francaise, 26,
Mirpur Road, Dharmondi
Date: May 26-30, Time: 5pm
onwards



Theatre
Play: Chhayabrita
Troupe: Shobdo
Natyacharcha Kendra
Venue: Experimental
Theatre Hall, BSA
Date: May 30
Time: 7pm



A lost soul

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

Nazrul was restless -- a defining trait in his character. He had been granted permission to come down from heaven to his beloved country to see for himself how his devotees were celebrating his 109th birthday. While the angels draped him in his favourite 'gerua khadder panjabi', he put on his black military boots that he always wore. His trademark -- untamed long curly hair falling loosely from underneath the bright yellow silk turban, he hummed a favourite tune *Sheye choley gechye boley*... The twinkle in his eye said it all -- he would hardly wait.

Nazrul had a plan chalked out. He would spend the day visiting all the organisations that work to cherish and honour him, in particular the Nazrul Institute. He would also make time to visit the Bangla Academy, the Shilpakala Academy, radio and the TV channels. The institutions had to be the focus, where he could see for himself the people teeming in, the music in the air and reminisce on the days of yore.

Weaving his way to the Nazrul Institute through a crammed Dhanmondi road 28, he became increasingly confused. He figured that once in the vicinity, he would simply follow the crowd. But where was the crowd? Where was his house? It took him some time to finally spot the decrepit building and what he saw shocked him to his core.

Nearly thirty-four years ago, this used to be his home. He had slowly slipped into a terminal illness and watched in silence as hundreds of people thronged day in and day out to get a glimpse of him and to express their adulation anyway they could. It was here where he bade farewell to the world, leaving behind his



ILLUSTRATION: TOMMY

admirers in a sea of grief. He had hoped the house would remain as a link to him and his memories. Now it seems, along with him, the house had died a premature death; the worn out structure looking helpless in the midst of a concrete wilderness.

As he walked in with dread steps, he saw a droopy receptionist at the entrance, responding half-heartedly to a few visitors. The auditorium itself looked

like a post war scene. It seemed a heavy shower or mild tremor would bring the ceiling crashing down. The musty smell was nauseating. Termites had taken full control of the auditorium. A chill ran down his spine, "It's only a matter of time before my lifetime's work is ruined because of sheer negligence and apathy," he thought.

Special classes were held, two days a week, he heard some people discussing

nearby. With hope, he made his way to the classrooms. But as the soft melody gradually became louder, Nazrul stopped dead in his tracks. These are not the tunes he had lovingly composed! In his prime, legendary singers had followed Nazrul's compositions with a rigid discipline, maintaining that certain magical appeal that defined his music. Now it seemed the students were fusing his style with their own. And where were

the reputed artistes who could guide the students? Who was in charge of preserving his notations? As he looked around desperately, the rooms seemed eerily empty.

At the Gramophone Company when Nazrul was signed as an exclusive trainer, eminent artistes such as Dilip

"It seemed that the fire was now being put out through sheer apathy -- had his work inherited his terminal illness?"

Kumar Rai, Sachin Dev Burman, KL Saigal, Tulsi Lahiri, Pronob Rai, Abbassuddin Ahmed, Kamol Das Gupta, Juthika Rai, Angur Bala, Indu Bala, Kamala Jharia and many others recorded songs under his guidance and gained immense popularity, turned into legends.

At the library, Nazrul noted with horror, the CDs featuring songs from original records, and 31 volumes of notations containing a thousand songs, lying under a layer of dust. Most artistes unfamiliar with the technique of following *swaralipi*, have probably bailed out and shifted to other genres.

The situation perplexed Nazrul. It wasn't as if there were no funds allocated by the government. But most of it

seemed to go to printing books, pamphlets, reprints -- anything -- but original articles. The songs that were so close to his heart were clearly not given the priority they deserved.

Nazrul remembered that he had composed 3500 songs -- on patriotism, *ghazals*, devotional, for theatre and cinema, and based on Turkish, Arabic and Cuban tunes all within a span of just 22 years. "Was that all in vain?" -- he thought.

Agitated, he left the venue and decided to go to Bangla Academy, which was a hub of scholars and cultural activities. The dimmed lights, however, were a clear indication that the programme had either been cancelled or not promoted properly. There were several other venues in the country where celebrations were on, but the mediocrity was too painful for the poet to bear any longer. Uncontrolled tears welled up, as it became apparent that his desire to listen to his creations on his birthday would remain unfulfilled.

As the moon emerged in the sky, Nazrul sat on the lawn and reminisced on his days in the Alipore Jail. Tagore had dedicated his play *Basanta* to Nazrul. He remembered his emergence on the literary scene of Calcutta, as a soldier poet -- a time when Rabindranath Tagore's influence was dominant. This was the golden age of Tagore's literature and it was difficult for any poet not to be up swept by his presence. Nazrul himself was influenced by Tagore. But very soon Nazrul started to break away from that trend, composing songs with fiery spirit, *heroic sentiment* and ignited a new found passion among readers and music enthusiasts. It seemed that the fire was now being put out through sheer apathy

-- had his work inherited his terminal illness?

Subhas Chandra Bose had once said that he had travelled to many war fronts of India but never had he been so moved by a song as spirited as Nazrul's *Durgomo Giri*. Bose said, "Whenever we will be at the war fronts or in jail, Nazrul's songs would always be our true inspiration." Nazrul took a deep breath -- were the songs taught at educational institutions to familiarise the young ones with the National Poet's works? Perhaps not, he thought.

What about the media, he thought? Surely with all the new technological developments he had observed from above, something could be done? And what about this 'globalisation' he had heard about? Didn't that imply promoting one's ideas to the world? Recording of the original songs by talented singers, attractive visual presentations of the songs could also draw the audience, couldn't they? What also concerned Nazrul was a dearth of skilled teachers across the country. He was also surprised that the government institutions, as well as sponsors or private institutions, seemed oblivious to the gradual decline that had set in.

But, there was no one to share his grief and it was time to return. Hurt and desolate, he made his way back to his abode in the heavens. The twinkling lights of stars greeted him. From a distance he could see a grand stage bedecked with flowers. Legendary artistes of yesteryears were waiting to greet him with his classics on his 109th birthday.

Perhaps his wish was to be fulfilled after all. But not in the earthly world!

"Nazrul Mela" by Channel-i



A group performance by singers

MAINUL HASSAN

May 25 marked the 109th birth anniversary of our National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. His works -- poetry, songs, features, essays and more -- played a great role during the movements against the British Raj. During the Liberation War his songs and poetry inspired the nation.

To celebrate Nazrul Jayanti, Channel-i organised a daylong "Nazrul Mela" at its Tejgaon office yesterday. This was the second Nazrul Mela by Channel-i.

The event was inaugurated at 11 am. As a symbolic gesture, *munia* birds were set free by renowned artistes and media personalities. Among others, artist Hashem Khan; Managing Director of Impress Telefilm Ltd, Faridur Reza Sagar; veteran Nazrul singer Sohrab Hossain; poet Asad Chowdhury and writer Imdadul Haq Milon attended the inauguration. A performance by the artistes of Nazrul Sangeet Shilpi Parishad followed.

Performances were held at an open stage, named "Nazrul Mancha" at the office premises, as well as an indoor stage. Solo performances were held on the indoor stage while the group performances by artistes of Nazrul Sangeet Shilpi Parishad, Nazrul Institute, Udichi, Wrishtiz, Sursaptak, Surbhar and other cultural organisations were held at the open stage.

Khalid Hossain, Ferdous Ara, Sujit Mustafa, Shela Baua, Yakub Ali Khan, Barkat Hossain, Dinu Ahmed, Bijon Chandra Mistri, Nawshin Laila, Sharmin Shathi Islam, Jannat-e-Ferdousi, Rahat Ara Geeti, Laila Afroz, Kazi Arif and others sang and recited poems at the mela.

At the programme, artists -- Hashem Khan, Jamal Ahmed, Biren Shome, Alokes Ghosh, Abdul Mannan and others

painted on the theme "Nazrul".

The mela had 20 well-decorated stalls by various organisations, including Nazrul Academy, Nazrul Institute, Sabon Prokashoni and Impress Audio Vision. The stalls featured books on Nazrul's works. There were also stalls featuring some rare photographs of the poet.

Though the mela was inaugurated with much enthusiasm, intermittent rain throughout the day disrupted the event.

Veteran artiste Ferdousi Rahman attended the mela. She said, "Last year I was overseas and couldn't attend the 'Nazrul Mela'. However, I did watch the event live on TV with my grandchildren."

Faridur Reza Sagar said, "The main reason behind organising the event is to celebrate the birth anniversary of our National Poet in a festive manner. Through initiatives like this, we want to take Nazrul to the world."

Programmes like this can generate interest among generations who are living abroad and have little or no idea of our culture."

Sharing his views, writer Imdadul Haq Milon said, "Both Nazrul and Rabindranath are iconic in our culture. Celebrating their birth anniversaries is a positive move by Channel-i."

The mela had something to offer to everyone. Children drew and painted on the theme "Nazrul" at an art competition held at the mela.

This year Channel-i presented the "Nazrul Mela '08 Aajibon Shommonman" to Nazrul artiste and exponent Sohrab Hossain. The veteran artiste received a cash prize of Tk 10,000. As part of the award, the artiste will receive Tk 10,000 from channel-i every month from now on.

Nazrul Mela was aired live on Channel-i yesterday.

Kabir Sumon and his "Jibonmukhi Gaan"



Kabir Sumon sings at the programme

JAMIL MAHMUD

On Fridays, the busy city life shifts into a slow gear. Last Friday (May 23) many music aficionados gathered at the National Museum to enjoy a solo performance by Kabir Sumon. The main auditorium was packed; some waited outside hoping to get tickets. A local organisation Chirkut organised the programme.

Sumon alone was on the stage with a guitar and a harmonica. A keyboard was also placed on the stage, which Sumon played with two or three songs.

The artiste began with a rendition of *Anek din por abar chena mukh*. The song could also refer to the fact that it was Sumon's first solo concert in Bangladesh after a gap of 10 years. The artiste did perform in a couple of programmes with others.

His next rendition was *O ganawala*. "Singing in Dhaka is certainly a pleasant experience. Sabina's (Yasmin) well-being adds to that bliss." Sumon dedicated the programme to the memory of Begum Sufia Kamal and Language Movement veteran Abdul Matin.

Next, the artiste rendered *Oito lokho chhelemeye*, a song Sumon wrote and composed on Begum Sufia Kamal.

"I was introduced to Begum Sufia Kamal in 1996 at Asaduzzaman Noor's residence," Sumon said at the programme.

Sumon's music is characterised as "Jibonmukhi Gaan" -- a genre that addresses contemporary issues. One of his recent albums highlights the violence in Nandigram, a small village in West Bengal.

One after another, Sumon performed *Shal Banglar beray agun*, *Janan dichchhey Nandigram* and *Rasta aatkey debo themey jabe shob*.

The highlight of the programme was Sabina Yasmin's performance. The seasoned artiste rendered *Kemon achho*, a song composed by Kabir Sumon. Though the audience requested the diva to perform more, she left the stage soon after the song. "This is Sumon's solo programme and it should remain so," said Sabina.

Sumon also sang some of his familiar songs including *Haal chhoro na bondhu*, *Jatiswar* and *Kotoba poth poroley*.

The curtain came down with a rendition of *Tomakey chai*.

Ekushey Television was the media partner of the programme.



A view of the crowd at "Nazrul Mela" organised by Channel-i

PHOTOS BY MUMIT M