

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Solo Exhibition

Title: The Limitless

Luminosity of Lines

Artist: Safiuddin Ahmed

Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, H 275/F, Rd 27 (old), Dhanmondi

Date: June 23-July 13

Time: 12pm-8pm

Oriental Art Exhibition

Artist: Abdul Aziz

Venue: Gallery Zoom, Alliance Francaise, 26, Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi

Date: June 19-July 2

Time: 9am-12pm and 5pm-8pm (Saturdays 5pm-8pm)

Theatre

Play: Roshadhar

Sudhadharer Rajya

Troupe: Bongorongo

Natyadai

Venue: Experimental Theatre Stage, BSA

Date: July 9

Time: 7pm

Solo Exhibition

Title: Labyrinth of Abstraction

Artist: Nazia Andaleeb

Prema

Venue: La Galerie, Alliance Francaise, 26, Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi

Date: July 3-16

Time: 9am-12pm; 5pm-8pm (Saturdays 5pm-8pm)

Labyrinth of Abstraction

Prema

## Banshi and Labu Mian's vision

JAMIL MAHMUD

In days gone by, young *rakhals* (cowherds) playing *banshi* (bamboo flute) under banyan trees was a common sight in rural Bengal. Today the scene has changed. One exception, however, is city dweller Labu Mian who 30 years ago embarked on his mission to acquaint urbanites with the instrument of the *rakhals*.

Over the last two decades, Labu Mian has been selling his *banshi* on the sidewalk in front of Institute of Fine Arts, DU. Taking up his forefather's profession, he has travelled all over Bangladesh to promote his *banshi*. In Labu's words, "I've been doing this since 1975. I've been to many districts with my *banshi*."

Labu's father, Heku Mian, is 104 years old. According to Labu, his father fought as a soldier in World War II. Labu Mian has three sons and a daughter. One of his sons is a first year student at Tejgaon College. Labu wishes to educate all of his children further.

Labu Mian supplies *banshi* to almost all major music outlets in Dhaka city. He also supplies flutes to shops in other big cities, including Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Rangpur. Over the years, the musician-craftsman has branched out; his flutes are now exported to several countries, including India, Pakistan, Japan, Kuwait, England and Norway. Besides the flute, *gauris* is also available at his shop. Labu Mian makes his flute at his Elephant Road residence with the help of his family members. To craft his instrument, he uses bamboo collected from the hilly regions of Chittagong and Sylhet. According to him, these bamboos are locally known as 'Benuka', 'Mittinga', 'Torai' or 'Dhulu'. To

Labu Mian playing banshi at IFA premises

PHOTO: MUMIT M

make a good flute, the bamboo should be over three-years-old.

Labu says that the quality of Bangladeshi bamboo flute is superior to that of other sub-continental countries. The price range of his instruments vary from Tk 10 to 3,000. Sales are at their peak prior to and during festivals such as *Pahela Baishakh* or *Pahela*

*Phalgun*.

The craftsmen but also a skilled flutist. He learned to play flute from several gurus. "My first teacher was my father. I also learnt from Sikim Ali of Bikrampur. My other gurus were the late Abdur Rahman and prominent composer the late Dhiri Ali."

Labu Mian has worked at Radio

Bangladesh for several years and regularly performed at stage shows. At present, he is scheduled to perform at the ongoing talent hunt, "Close Up 1: Gao Bangladesh Gao."

He also trains some music enthusiasts. "Students of DU and Fine Arts randomly come to me to learn to play the flute. I also have

some regular students who train at my residence."

Labu Mian believes that more steps should be initiated by the authorities to promote *banshi*. "My initial mission was to acquaint the youth with the melody of the flute. I'm optimistic about the future of the instrument," he concludes.

## Celebrating the man who gave us "Safed Hathi" and "Kabuliwala"

To celebrate the 60th year of India's Independence, among other things, the Indian government will honour living movie legends -- Tapan Sinha, Dilip Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar and Saroja Devi -- by conferring them with lifetime achievement awards.

On this occasion, Tathagata Bandyopadhyay -- grandson of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay (author of *Pather Panchali*) -- raises a toast to Tapan Sinha, the Bengali director who gave the audience classics like *Hansuli Baank-er Upokotha*, *Jhinda-er Bandi*, *Safed Haathi*, *Kabuliwala* and *Ek Doctor Ki Maut*.

Tathagata Bandyopadhyay: "When I was about four or five, I was just beginning to discover that it was uncool for boys to weep. One day, my pet parakeet cut its claw on a sharp cage bar. I saw blood dripping from the injured limb, and found myself sniffing uncontrollably. I felt I had to hide from my mother the fact I was a cry baby. I told her I had a cold. I suspect she knew what the matter was (she must have -- children don't suddenly develop a cold that's better in an hour or so). But she said nothing."

"That's always been the way with me. I'm not the soulful type but I can't stand the suffering of animals. When someone throws a rock at a starving mongrel that is sitting in the gutters, I'm ready to commit violence. I also feel ready to weep, but manage to hold it back because guys aren't supposed to snivel in public."

"I first came to know this when my mother took me to watch *Safed Haathi* at a local cinema house. I find on an Internet database that this film was released in 1978, so this must have been about the same time as the parakeet incident, perhaps a little earlier."

"I wasn't usually allowed to watch movies at that time (this was before we had television) because they were deemed a corrupting influence. Only two kinds of movies were allowed -- those made specifically for children, and those

Tapan Sinha, seated in the centre

which my parents considered to be of an edifying nature or helpful for building character."

"In this last category, I watched various inferior religious-themed melodramas involving minor gods and goddesses which I highly enjoyed at the time, biopics of great men and women which I generally tried to avoid, and patriotic films, which were okay because they had a lot of gunfights."

"Not too many films could be found in the first category, and its definition was confusing too. Mother once took me to watch 'Masoom', thinking it was for children. She was hugely scandalised that I was watching intimate scenes between Shabana Azmi and Naseeruddin Shah, while I was thoroughly bored and kept asking her when the real action would begin. But that's another story."

"Safed Haathi" may have been the very first movie I ever watched -- I don't have memory of any

before that. I don't remember the details of the story, only that it was about a large, innocent, friendly, good elephant being persecuted by dangerous, cruel, bad men. I came out sobbing, powerfully moved."

"The plot synopsis on the database says it had a happy ending. Yet, the impression I have always retained is of an intensely painful and intensely beautiful movie -- perhaps the kind of intensity only children can feel. For the next day or two, I felt a lump in my throat whenever I remembered the good elephant's predicament."

"That was my first experience of Tapan Sinha's work though I doubt I even knew the word 'director' at that time. Not that I would have cared, if I had. Cinema was cinema, pictures and sounds with stories. Who needed directors? 'Safed Haathi' was great; I had no use for Tapan Sinha or whoever."

"Three decades later, I have a revised opinion on the subject. I

think we could use more filmmakers like him. Unlikely, but still."

"I am no film critic, and don't command the type of jargon and attitude that seem to be indispensable in sophisticated modern critical writing if one hopes to be taken seriously. Nor am I a scholar of Tapan Sinha's works. All I can talk about is how a well-made children's film really affects a child."

"The effect on me of watching *Safed Haathi* was profound. I believe the film was largely responsible for what I feel for animals now. Deeper in, I believe it was this film that first introduced to me several moral dichotomies of life in a clear and powerful way: Honest vs Dishonest, Friendly vs Greedy, Innocent vs Cruel. And of course, Good vs Evil. Basic stuff, and top

starkly done in black and white. But children don't understand shades of grey, basic stuff is what they need. Tapan Sinha is a master of that idiom."

"Later, I realised 'Safed Haathi' wasn't thematically unique in his opus. Tapan Sinha's great recurrent subject is the oppression of innocents and loners by the greedy, small-minded and cruel."

"Rahamat in *Kabuliwala* is a huge Afghan who can commit murder if provoked, but in his soul he is as pure as the girl Minnie, who reminds him of his own daughter in his distant homeland. This gentle giant from the land of deserts and hills, too free in spirit, doesn't understand law and order in the land of little men, doesn't speak their language, and can only suffer mutely as he finds his freedom curbed."

"The hero of 'Ek Doctor Ki Maut', the outstanding scientist Dr Dipankar Roy, is hounded and crushed by his colleagues simply because he is better than them."

"These characters do not seem to me too different from the white elephant, who is persecuted simply because it is rare. Which is not to say that he has no variety. 'Kshudhita Pashan', 'Hatey Bazare', 'Jotugriha', 'Nirjan Saikatey' and many other accomplished films have less elemental, more 'adult' subjects, and do not conform to any pattern that I can discover. 'Golpo Holec Satti' and 'Tonsil' are fine comedies."

"But my own dominant experience of his work concerns his outstanding individual-baited-by-jealous-oppressors theme. I have a gut feeling that these are the works the future shall remember him by."

"To judge a director's technical excellence is beyond my ability. As I said before, I have no great understanding of camera angles, montages and such like. But whenever I have sat down to watch one of Tapan Sinha's films, I have expected an uplifting story neatly and skillfully told. I am yet to be disappointed. They just don't make directors like that any more."

Source: rediff.com

## Roquaiya Hasina

### A dedicated Tagore singer

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Singer Roquaiya Hasina Neely is well known for her purist approach to rendering Rabindra Sangeet. Her third music album, "Baaje Jhona Gaan" was released in Dhaka in 2006 and was appreciated by Tagore enthusiasts. The songs are now available on several websites (Google: Roquaiya Hasina). Songs from her third album were played on radio stations in USA and Australia. Her fourth album is set to be released next month.

At the tender age of five, Roquaiya began training in music. A major source of inspiration was her father Rashidul Hasan, a teacher of English at Dhaka University, who was so taken by Rabindra Sangeet that he dreamed that his daughter would one day be an accomplished Tagore singer.

Unfortunately, he did not live to see this day, as he was abducted by the collaborators of the Pakistani army from his residence on Dhaka University campus on December 14, 1971. Later, he was brutally killed.

After the death of her father, Roquaiya and her family went through hard times. However, the young girl didn't forget her father's wish and continued her music education. She finished a five-year course in music from Chhayanat. She went on to perform on Bangladesh Betar and BTV in 1977. Now she is enlisted as a special grade artist in BTV and Betar.

Before going to USA with her husband Dr. Shahidul Hassan in 1984, Roquaiya took classes at Chhayanat. She also performed in New York at a programme celebrating the 50th anniversary of the conferment of the Nobel Prize on Rabindranath Tagore. She regarded this participation as a great honour and recognition of her dedication to Rabindra sangeet. She sang Tagore songs as a guest artiste at the 'Rabindra Mela' in New Jersey in 1988. Among others, renowned artistes Dr. Sanjida Khatun and Banani Ghosh sang Tagore songs at the cultural programme. Roquaiya's interview was aired from Voice of America (VOA) in 1989.

"I participated at many cultural functions arranged by different Bengali Associations in Canada. The audience admired my renditions and took initiatives to record my songs and released two music albums from Canada in 1988," she said.

Roquaiya expresses her gratitude to the late Abdul Ahad, late Waheedul Haque, Dr. Sanjida Khatun and Aijit Roy for their inspiration and support. She remains dedicated to music and wants to work with Dr. Sanjida Khatun, Kalim Sharafi, Aijit Roy and other renowned artistes in promoting Rabindra sangeet in the country and overseas.

## Online art: Coming of age

KAVITA CHARANJII, New Delhi

In this digital age, can art afford to not jump on the bandwagon? There may be a polarity of opinion on this score but, like it or not, art online is here to stay. Take Delhi, for instance. The city has several galleries, which exhibit their works on their websites and even sell their art works without a face to face between buyers and sellers.

One such innovative art gallery is Palette Art Gallery. Since it went online in 2003, says manager Aditi Khurana, the gallery has drawn customers from Australia, USA, Vietnam, Switzerland, France, Japan and Mumbai. While the Palette had only 70 online registered members in 2003, there are now 3,000 such members. In fact, says Aditi, 60 percent of Palette's sales takes place on the Net.

How does she react to the oft repeated criticism that art online is not the greatest ways of buying paintings or other art forms? In her words, "If people really like a work of art, they will buy it. Sometimes the sales go through word of mouth and I am asked my opinion on certain art works."

For younger artists, art online is a popular way of showcasing their talents. Along with artists like MF Husain, Tyeb Mehta, Palette has featured young online creative artists such as Baiju Parthan, Atul Dodiya, Anju Dodiya, and Riyaz Komu. Then there are upcoming talents such as Binoy Varghese, Suneel Mamadapur, Pratul Dash and lately Gigi Scaria. What's best is the website is updated regularly and proffers the public a great way of seeing past exhibitions as well.

Moment of eternity (left) by George Martin P.G., from a recent exhibition titled Cavities... on paletteartgallery.com

A big player in online art is the Mumbai-based Saffronart. Says a spokesperson quoted on the Net: "Saffronart has made reach to Indian art simple and instantaneous by combining a series of critically acclaimed international exhibitions, events and auctions, together with a strong online presence. The website (www.saffronart.com) has extended the company's travelling exhibits and art activities beyond their physical locations by providing convenient access to an extensive range of art for sale, along with detailed information on artists, interviews, exhibitions, events and more." Saffronart's online catalogues brings together several thousand art works from established and emerging artists, each delivered virtually anywhere in the world, accompanied by a Saffronart authenticity certificate.

There are several heartening stories to show the might of the Net in the art arena. For the Bangalore-based small time art shop owner Vasudevarao Umesh, selling paintings and other art objects was just another source of income, while earning money as a transcriptionist from his shop's computer. From cashing in on India's outsourcing boom, he realized that technology could come to his aid and give a much needed boost to his income. In a feature story online, he is quoted as saying: "I have customers from all over India, as well as from Australia and US and now I get greater and quicker response online as compared to my offline business."

Creating such online galleries are software companies like Gurbinder Dhillon's Orbit System. In an interview with *The Indian Express*, Dhillon is quoted as saying, "The galleries are linked to the most powerful search engines, including Google, which places even obscure galleries on an online platform 24/7 global customers. The website allows buyers to browse the latest artistic works and then buy what appeals to them through credit card, wire transfer or cheque payment."

Artistic and public opinion is, however, divided on the score of online art. Taking a somewhat purist view is well-known artist Madhoor Kapoor, who opposes the commodification of art. "Online trading of art is unfair to both the artist and the buyer. If people are spending money on an art work, they want to see the original and gauge its size, materials and colours." However, Madhoor is not averse to the concept of popularising art through the Net. Explains the artist, "If the Net can fuel curiosity about a painting or draw people to visit museums, then it is worthwhile."

A diametrically opposite view is that of Vasundhara Tewari Broto, another talented artist. Though she herself does not put her work online, she points out that other organisations may have done so. "In this day and age, one cannot help go on the Net. In fact, the first time a musical programme was aired on All India Radio in the 1940s, there was vociferous opposition and people called it cheapening music. Today, despite this, music reaches the radio of the neighbourhood *paanwala* as well."

Bangladesh art galleries would do well to explore the options of online art exhibitions and trading. And there are a lot of young and upcoming artists who may be open to this option.

An untitled work by Pratul Dash on saffronart.com