

Mohammad Hassan Ali

Photo: Zahedul I Khan

Asked which flautist he likes best, during his tête-à-tête at Café Veranda, Hassan Ali says, Hassan Ali says that he admires Bari Siddiqui and Ustad Shamsul Huq (his tèacher). He claims that he is the senior-most living flautist in the radio, TV and stage in Bangladesh, having begun his career in 1979. He says that he enjoys playing as an accompanist and as a soloist -- although he prefers the latter, as then he is more in the limelight. When he accompanies, he does not have any preference, as such, and lends his music to Rabindra sangeet, Nazrul sangeet, folksongs and other modern compositions. Similarly, he plays with gusto for folk, traditional and modern dances, as well, and naturally for dance-dramas too. "All tunes are worth playing and contemplating on. All lend felicity to the soul. Every tune takes one away from the humdrum world," Hassan Ali says with a ready chuckle.

Hassan Ali has accompanied Mehdi Hassan when he came twice to Bangladesh -- making two cassettes in the process (1985); Fatema-ut-Zohra; Shubir Nandi, Shammi Akhter; Pilu Mumtaz; Rothindra Nath etc. The words have been of lyricists like Jiwan Chowdhury, Kazi Shafiqul Islam and Abdul Karim Sarkar.

Asked what were the essential components of a successful flautist, Hassan Ali says," One must have a firm concept of the musical notes; one must love the flute; one has to dedicate oneself to this sensitive instrument to produce delicate and lyrical notes. The player should be able to present both pensive and jubilant moods -- with passion and dexterity. One must be ready to take up something else as an interest, apart from flute playing, so as not to flounder over the flute as a means of existence." Hassan Ali tried his hand at music direction for TV and films too.

He has played solo at Rotterdam (1994), where the audience of western listeners comprised a gathering of over a thousand; and where the listeners sat through with rapt attention. It is this experience that the flautist treasures the most. He also performed as a member of the Bangladeshi delegation at Pakistan (1991); Uzbekistan (1995); England (1997); Myanmar (1998) and Spain (2000).

Talking about his students, incidentally, Hassan Ali points out, that they include only four, comprising Dr Mominuzzaman Khan of the "Heart Foundation", Farya of "Text-Mart", and his younger brother Mohammad Hossain Ali. As the playing of this particular type of musical instrument does not insure a big bank balance, students of music do not venture to take up the flute as a profession, Hassan Ali says.

The maestro ended his interview by dwelling on the different "raags", like "emon" , "todi", "jhijhit" and "khambaz" and their moods -- and even played some of them in the café after the interview. ■