

WHAT'S ON

Bengal-ITC SRA Classical Music Fest
Organiser: Bengal Foundation
Venue: Army Stadium, Banani, Dhaka
Date: Nov 29-Dec 2

Duet Art Show
Title: Blue Mountain Scape
Venue: Shilpjanan Gallery, H-7, Rd-13, New Dhammandi
Date: November 15-20
Time: 12-8pm

Int'l Theatre Festival
Organiser: Theatre Art Unit
Venue: Shilpkala Academy
Date: November 14-24
Time: 6:30pm

Solo Art Exhibition
Artist: Sami Ach
Venue: Dhaka Art Centre, Dharmoond
Date: Nov 9-19
Time: 3pm-8pm

Group Art Exhibition
Venue: Gallery Cosmos-2, New DBHS, Mohakhali
Date: Nov 16-24
Time: 11am-8pm

Solo Art Exhibition
Artist: Mike Woodcock
Venue: Institute of Art and Culture, Gulshan
Date: Nov 15-30
Time: 12pm-8pm

Solo Art Exhibition
Artist: Sabrina Mezzaluna
Venue: Bengal Art Lounge, Gulshan
Date: Nov 3-22
Time: 12pm-8pm

Bangla flavours the Bard

VEEJAY SAI

The Ranga Shankara annual theatre festival 2012 this year celebrated the eternal Bard of theatre: the legacy of Shakespeare. With plays in eight languages, from the famous Globe to Globe component, for the first time Shakespeare was reinterpreted with far more festivity than his own natives would have done it. The Dhaka Theatre from Bangladesh took audiences by storm with their colourful and lively adaptation of "The Tempest", directed by Nasiruddin Yousuf.

"The Tempest" as legend goes was supposed to be Shakespeare's last play. Dhaka Theatre's adaptation in Bengali saw a far more enjoyable adaptation of the play. An eager, packed hall of audiences sat in rapt attention from the very go with the sheer visual delight of the simple yet elegant set erected. The backdrop was painted in masts of a wrecked ship with an image of the mythical Al Buraq prominent, all set to take viewers on yet another magical ride. Metal trunks painted in bright calendar art (from Hanuman carrying the Sanjeevani mountain to scenes to horses) forming a wall had the audience in eager anticipation of what was to unfold on stage.

The story needs no introduction or elaboration. As the characters came on stage to pick their respective trunks and return to their position at the far end of the stage, the play began with the blowing of a holy conch, almost beckoning the opening of a war sequence, a metaphor for the shipwreck from which King Alonso and his fellow travellers land on Prospero's island. Prospero (brilliantly performed by Rubol Lodi) struts around on his toes like a ballet dancer, creating a slow dizzy effect as he orders his loyal magician spirit Ariel (once again brilliantly performed by a sweet-throated Shimul Yousuf). Who would have



PHOTO COURTESY: SIMON KANE

thought a woman could perform the role of Ariel so well? With her other spirits, they created magic and how! Manipuri resounded in the theatre as drummers Nila Moni Singha and Bidhan Singha flipped in circles on the stage. A few roles like that of Miranda (performed by Esha Yousuf), who ought to have been a more suave princess did not come forth in the characterization. Even Trinculo (by Saimum Jahan Dola)

remained unconvincing in patches but was balanced out by her dialogue with Caliban (a robust-voiced Chandan Chowdhury). But most of the casting did justice to what their characters demanded. The Bard wouldn't have expected to see this kind of south Asian aesthetic in the most remote of his fanciful imagination, beyond the barriers of language and theatrical structures.

All the actors were also excellent

singers and this facet enhanced the production to a different level. In most South Asian theatre traditions and performance practices, music, dance and theatre aren't separated as they are in the western world. Utilising this quality, director Nasiruddin Yousuf explored the script in great detail to inculcate as much as possible.

As the story proceeds, we get to see a wealth of south Asian and eastern cultural traditions from Bangladesh. From poems by Tagore to Bhatiyali boat songs, from softly sung melodious raags to attractive costumes, from gamchas to ghungroos, Palagan to Manipuri Naatpata traditions, dhols to turbans, the play comes alive as never before, as opposed to the dark and intense European versions of it. Pushing the Bard's supposedly inaccessible language over its edges, "The Tempest" presented by Dhaka Theatre recreated a different kind of magic, just apt for the cultural context to where they belong. A revelation was the young and talented Rubayet Ahmed, whose pen translated this arduous script into the confines of the sweetness of the Bengali language. Without a doubt, he can be counted among the next generation theatre professionals, and someone to look out for, from Bangladesh.

All in all, the play was a thoroughly enjoyable experience and probably one of the finest interpretations of the play one could catch. On a standing ovation from a packed hall, ending on an emotional note when the director reminded everyone of the support India provided during the 1971 war, a new bond of friendship was forged. For art sees no boundaries and artists are global citizens with no nationalities to hold them and this point couldn't have been better put across.

Veejay Sai is a well-known award-winning writer, editor and a culture critic.



ALIMUR RAHMAN KHAN

The Bengal Foundation and the ITC-SRA together are organising a grand music conference in Bangladesh. Many well-known artists are coming from India and it is also perhaps going to include a great dance personality like Birju Maharaj. It is expected that classical artists from Bangladesh will get some chance to bloom in the company of the senior artists from India.

The conference is to begin from the 29 Nov. and continue till December 2, in Dhaka. The sponsors should consider having small concerts in places like Chittagong, Mymensingh and Rajshahi also. These could be one-day programmes if the need be. These are places whose names are well-installed in the records of

the history of classical music in Eastern India at least from the second half of the 19th century. There could be still a few listeners who should be honoured; perhaps the dying embers will ignite again.

As a civilisation and its culture are evaluated by later generations through the traces left behind over a period of time. The Indian culture has expressed its best in philosophy, music and architecture. They all combined to define a set of values in life. The classical music or rather the classical music system of North India has supposedly evolved out of an earlier music system of India. It is claimed to be still in existence in the South.

The Muslims, once they established themselves in the sub-continent from around the 12th century, took up the music

of India seriously. The best of music till then was restricted, more or less, to the temples and was considered sacred from a religious point of view. The Muslims managed to bring it out of this framework, without being sacrilegious. They managed to secularise it without vulgarisation. They combined this music with whatever they could bring from the music of Central Asia, which in turn was influenced by the Persian and mainly Arabian music. The result altogether was charming.

In this connection a few suggestions are laid down below.

1. This should not be a one-time affair. It should be repeated annually and also small conferences should be held on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

2. There still exist in the country some avid listeners, people who appreciate this art fully and wholly. They are limited by age, financial constraints and absence of quality performers. However, a kind of revival of this art is also taking place. A younger group of people is coming in that fold but they have constraints too. These are financial constraints and absence or lack of quality performers. The music has to be taken to doorsteps of these new listeners, as far as possible.

3. Universities and their students should be brought into the fold of listeners. They should be wooed if necessary.

4. Newspapers, television and other media as well as a word-of-mouth diffusion of information have to be explored. More so, after the conference, the glow of it should be continued through the media by several follow-ups of parts of the programme and several articles should appear in the papers from time to time.

5. Several concerts should be arranged in private houses, with a kind of an open invitation to listeners.

Cultural activities do not necessarily

establish culture in a society. Many activities and efforts are needed to integrate it into becoming a culture. An isolated grand music conference will not integrate in the culture. It has to become a churcha. It has to be followed up with many activities and efforts as mentioned above.

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3. Seminars should be held in Dhaka and in Kolkata, to start with so that the movement continues.

Before closing, a quotation from Imam Gazzali as he puts it in his Ihya-ulum-ud-Deen may not be inappropriate. Speaking about music he says (quoting from memory) "...in the hearts of people there are caves which are filled with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and other precious stones but there is also the presence of inferior stones even coal and ashes from burnt coals. To reach the heart one has to go through the portals of the ears with the help of music....but music cannot bring out what is not there.... This is a very significant and profound statement.

Other such statements are attributed to Al-Gazzali and even to Shihabuddin Shurawardi, but this is not the place for these discussions.

The North Indian Music system is based on Raagas. A raag is a musical expression of a stable modal pattern expressed through sound and rhythm. It is comparable to a painting where sound is used for colours, the raag being the theme of the picture.

Various schools or "gharanas" are free to use their own methods to express the final product. With improvement in communication, the gharanas do influence each other and are in turn influenced by them. There is no harm if it is done carefully and efficiently.

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The classical music is well-suited for the purpose of extracting the hidden jewels which are dormant in the hearts of the people but it cannot draw out what is not there. This therefore draws readers to another area. It is the potentiality of the North Indian Classical music towards contributing to the uplift of the general moral and culture of a society.

There is much to be said but that has to be for another day and another time. This is enough for this day.

Alimur Rahman Khan is a connoisseur of music.

Television to compete for top award at Dubai film fest



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After its world premiere and coming by rave reviews at the 17th Busan International Film Festival, Mostafa Sarvar Farooqi's "Television" will compete for the top award "Al Mohr" at the upcoming Dubai International Film Festival.

The film, which is about a village elder's fight against the influence of television, will compete along with 14 more films made by some recognised names from across the globe.

Farooqi will attend the festival to be held from December 9 to 16 in the Gulf city.

So far, the organisers have announced a few films from the category.

They include "Way of Saints" (USA) by Sundance winner Musa Syeed, "Ship of Theseus" (India) by Anand Gandhi and "Your Beauty is Worth Nothing" (Austria) by Hüseyin Tabak, according to international film related journals The Hollywood Reporter, Screen Daily, Variety and Film Business Asia.

The final 15 names will be announced on November 26.

"Television" was the curtain wrapper at the Busan fest, an honour previously earned by some of Asia's most acclaimed directors including Hong Kong's Wong Kar-Wai in 2000 with "In the Mood for Love" and China's Zhang Yimou with "Not One Less" in 1999.

"Television" is a collaborative venture of Chobial, Star Cineplex and German production house Mogador Film, Anisul Haq and Farooqi jointly penned the script. The film has Shaheen Huda, Mostafar Karim, Nusrat Imroz Tisha and Chanchal Chowdhury in starring roles.

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Different colours, different presentations Theatre Art Unit's 20th anniversary fest in full swing

JAMIL MAHMUD

The 10-day International Theatre Festival marking Theatre Art Unit's 20th anniversary began at the Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy, on November 14. Over the first four days, eight plays were staged at the National Theatre Hall and Experimental Theatre Hall, while each evening also featured either brief traditional theatrical or musical presentations in front of the National Theatre Hall.

The organisers have invited five overseas troupes (four from India and one from Nepal). Fourteen local troupes have been presenting as many plays. They together add different colours to the festival, in a sense, with different theatrical presentations.

On the first day, Theatre (Bailey Road) and Indian troupe Swapnobhumi staged their plays "Payer Awaj Pawa Jee" and "Macbeth" respectively at the Experimental Theatre Hall.

The lyrical drama "Payer Awaj Pawa Jee" had the everlasting appeal that once again reminded us about the trial of war criminals. The play aptly articulates the dangers of ignorance and the misuse of religion for devious ends. Sudip Bidushak (from Bhopal) in presenting a vibrant performance.

The troupe led by celebrated director Bansi Kaul presented two plays-- "Sandawgar" and "Raaraang" and

and revenge. The play has been adapted by Ujjal Chattopadhyay, while Kaushik Sen has directed it.

The over two-hour-long play had an impact on the audience. However, the Kolkata based troupe could not overlap from their neighbouring troupe Rang Bidushak (from Bhopal) in presenting a vibrant performance.

The last three days saw the staging of three local plays-- "Mahajomer Nao", "Raaraang" and "Sidhi dar Sidhi urf Tukka pe Tukka" -- at the National Theatre Hall, on November 16 and 17. Directed by Kaul, both the plays were colourful. The director chose to go for some acrobatic skills. With clown costumes and heavily painted faces, the actors created an aura of amusement, though according to the director the underlying message and social satire was not lost altogether.

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70 years of Martin Scorsese

ABAK HUSSAIN

November 17 was the 70th birthday of one of America's greatest living film directors, Martin Scorsese. He has been making feature films for 45 years, and continues to do so today. Hailed as a living legend for decades now, Scorsese does not rest on his laurels like some of his contemporaries, but continues to work in new directions. He still wants to experiment, learn and grow, get better.

Martin Scorsese was born in Queens in 1942 to Italian parents Charles and Catherine Scorsese. You can get a closer look at his parents in Scorsese's 1974 documentary "Italianamerican". A film as simple as it gets, it shows his parents sitting around the dinner table, talking about their background. Look closely at the body language and dynamic of his parents and you will see how this is channeled in some of his later films, particularly "Goodfella", where Catherine Scorsese plays the mother of the psychopath Tommy and all she cares about is making something for the boys to eat, like Italian mothers everywhere.

Unlike his contemporary and friend Steven Spielberg, Scorsese keeps his work grounded in his life and reality; he himself has admitted that his movies are his life. The reel is indistinguishable from real. Watch any Scorsese interview; he peppers his conversation with references to movies. James Lipton asked him where his parents were from, and he replied that his father was from Palermo, and quickly mentioned the work of Italian filmmaker Visconti as a frame of reference. That's how he connected to it.

In 1980 he made his second masterpiece, "Raging Bull", a biopic of middleweight boxer Jake LaMotta. Shot in gritty black and white, it features a devastating performance from Robert De Niro who picked up his second Oscar for it. Appreciation for "Raging Bull" increased over the years and is widely hailed as the best film of the eighties. Throughout the rest of the eighties though, Scorsese continued to make good movies but critical reactions were mixed. "The King of Comedy" was too emotionally barren, some complained. "The Color of Money" was too commercial, critics said. "The Last Temptation of Christ", a project close to Scorsese's heart, confused viewers, bored those uninterested in religion and offended traditional Christians due to its depiction of Jesus as a human being with flaws.