

Palbasha Siddique's ethereal voice transports listeners to ecstatic peaks.
PHOTO COURTESY: PALBASHA SIDDIQUE

in the background in one episode of *the Daily Show*. Meanwhile, it shot up to the top 10 of Amazon's soundtrack downloads and is also in the top 100 of all its MP3 downloads. At one point it was up over Madonna and Mariah Carey. The Head of organ department at Oberlin Music College called it "the best music he had ever heard."

"I knew the poem in English, but had no idea how it would sound in Bangla," says Harding. "Palbasha did the work of fitting the poem to the music Garry had written and it came together perfectly in the recording.

I did very little to make *Praan* happen. I chose talented people to work with and then got out of their way."

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However you interpret *Praan*, there is something uplifting about the spectacle of all the different nationalities of almost every colour and shape, dancing away without any inhibition. Children are the first responders to Harding's infectious vibe — wherever he goes to dance there are a bunch of them laughing and trying to imitate his flailing steps.

Praan seeks to transport listeners to ecstatic peaks with driving rhythms and spiraling improvisations that Schyman orchestrated with a 25-piece band. The silken voice of Palbasha that carried Praan across the world has a perfect balance of freedom and fluidity. Palbasha says via email, "Garry did an amazing job creating this piece of music. The way he tuned it went perfectly with the Bengali language. There were many other people in the studio including Matt who were very helpful and advised me on things that could be done better. I still feel fortunate for this groundbreaking opportunity."

Born in Jessore, Palbasha Siddique along with her mother moved to Minnesota in 2001 as a fourth grader. Her older brother was already attending university there. Back in Bangladesh, she was trained at Abbas Uddin Academy for a while and then BAFA in Dhanmondi. Her guru, Sujeyo Shyam Ghosh has been one of her greatest influences. In the US, she attended MacPhail Center for Music for about 7 years. "I trained in classical music, did some opera, and jazz. I also attended multiple musical workshops to try out different genre. In high school, I started getting into musical theatre and ended up winning multiple awards from the state for my performance," says Siddique. At 11, she was invited to sing "God Bless America" during the seventh-inning stretch at a Minnesota Twins Major League Basketball game. "I've sung a fair number of Tagore songs, but that was not my specialty," says Siddique. "I think that actually helped me do the song the way that we did." She has been doing songs with some Bangladeshi and Indian composers, which have been used in tele-films. Also a brilliant student, she expects to graduate in Psychology this December.

Praan may be a humble attempt to understand even a tiny portion of the mystery of Life's eternity and appreciate the marvelous structure of existence. It is the equivalent of the invisible sea into which, in a fine interweaving of melodies set by Garry Schyman and envisioned by Matt Harding, Palbasha Siddique ceaselessly pours herself, like the rising and falling trajectories of life. After it is long over, you cannot help feeling a little happier. And you want to find it in the heart of a friend. ■