

WHAT'S ON

Nazrul Sammelan  
Title: Amar-e Debona Bhulitey  
Organiser: Writers Foundation Bangladesh  
Venue: Kobi Sufia Kamal Auditorium, National Museum  
Date: Aug 27  
Time: 9:30am

Dance and Musical Programme

Title: Anup Tomar Bani- Tagore In Europe  
Organiser: Nitya Nandan  
Venue: Chhayanaut Auditorium, Dhanmondi

Nari Jagoron-er Nattya Ayojon

Venue: National Theatre Hall and Experimental Theatre Hall, Shilpakala Academy  
Date: Aug 19-24  
Time: 6:30pm

Theatre

Marking Selim Al Deen Birth Anniversary  
Play: Chaka  
Venue: Natmandal, Dhaka University  
Date: Aug 23-25, Time: 7pm

Musical Evening

Artists: Yasmin Mushtari and Nandita Yasmin  
Venue: Kobi Sufia Kamal Auditorium, National Museum  
Date: Aug 24  
Time: 6pm

# The musical dance of Alarmel Valli

LUBNA MARIUM

Alarmel Valli, Bharatanatyam dancer par excellence, represents the joie de vivre of dance. Valli's early training in music under the legendary musician, T. Muktha, helped shape her ideal of an intensely musical dance style. It is a tradition that deepened her awareness of the fact that text and music are as inseparably linked as 'the word and its meaning'. Her approach to *sahitya* or the lyrical content of each composition is marked by the impulse to tune into the silences in a stanza, the blank spaces in a text. This ability to relate to poetry as a complex compound of music and meaning also inspires her, as she often says, it's about 'writing' with her body, 'singing' with her art.

Amongst the numerous awards Valli received, two are India's highest civilian honours -- the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan, conferred by the President of India. There are also the Chevalier of Arts and Letters award from the French Government, the 'Grande Medaille de la Ville de Paris', the award from the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the state award of Kalaimamani from the Tamil Nadu Government.

During Valli's visit to Dhaka, I caught up with the illustrious dancer.

How would you describe the relationship between your dance and yourself?

Alarmel Valli: Dance means many things to me. It is the very pulse of my life. It is the language in which I best express myself. I feel, my dance is the truest expression of who I am. In it all that is best in me gets crystallised and I realise myself more fully, more intensely, more meaningfully than in any other walk of life.

When I dance, I feel I am at once a poet, a painter and a singer. I write my personal dance poems using the language of dance. I paint my dancing spaces, adding colours and tints to the line-drawings of the songs that I choreograph. And, when dance and music go hand in hand, I feel I sing with my body and that the music dances.

But ultimately for me, dance is a prayer with my entire being -- not a formal, austere ritual, but a transforming experience, a joyous celebration of the wonder and mystery of life.

What are the key characteristics of your style and



PHOTO: ATL AAKASH

how has your dance presentation evolved through the years?

Alarmel Valli: Our classical dance has immense scope for dynamic growth, creative exploration and innovation for it is but a language, which must be internalised to write one's own dance poetry.

My great gurus, Pandanallur Sri Chokkalingam Pillai and his son Sri Subbaraya Pillai gave me the most precious of gifts -- the soundest of foundations in dance grammar and technique, but the freedom to be my own dancer. Today, while my dance style is recognizable as my own, it demarcates aspects of the Pandanallur Gharana.

Thanks to my gurus, classical dance, for me, is not just a received grammar, but also a reinvented one. The forms I inherited from my dance and music gurus are but the foundations on which I build structures, both in time and space. Even when I interpret ancient poems through the classical idiom, my dance is refracted through the prism of my contemporary, personal experience of dance, music, literature and life.

Music and poetry are central to my interpretation of dance and my perception of dance as visual melody and visual poetry significantly influences my choice of pieces to choreograph. Studying music with the legendary singer, Smt. T Muktha, I felt my body instinctively responding to the curves and cadences of the music, where, not only the words of the song, but almost every nuance, pause, or trill in the music found expression in corresponding movements. For many years now, I have spoken of my ideal of dance as one, where the *rasika* can see the music and hear the dance.

As for poetry, I see dance as a language where every step is an alphabet, every movement a word -- a language with which I write my dance-poems. More than 20 years ago, thanks to my mother, I stumbled on the beauty of "Sangam" poetry, many of the poems authored around 2,000 years ago and I have created a significant body of dance-poems embroidered around these poems.

Since the original music for these poems has been lost over the centuries, I work with a musician to set the poems to music, in a way that evokes the music of the text. In a poem from the "Kuruthugai" anthology, the cold winter's midnight against which it is set becomes a metaphor for the woman's desolation; the soft tinkle of a bell around a bull's neck, as it shakes away a buzzing fly

conveys her tormented frame of mind. I asked my singer, Prema Ramamoorthy, to evoke the stormy night and the buzzing of a fly through the *swara*.

Recently, I worked on eminent poet Arundhati Subramaniam's "Vigil" -- a modern, contemporary love poem. "Vigil" with its central thread of gentle irony, was part of a production of secular love poetry through the ages called "Only Until the Light Fades". There was actually a time when I said that working with an English poem was impossible, that the cadences and syntaxes of the two languages -- of the English and Bharatanatyam vocabulary would not go together. But we change, we evolve and the impossible becomes suddenly feasible. However, I never create, merely to pander to political correctness, to be novel, or 'marketable'. I need to feel a deep connectedness with the poems or music that I work on.

My deep regret is that I have as yet been unable to find a singer in Chennai, with whom I can work in depth, on production of the exquisite poetry of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam and other great Bengali poets. It is a dream I hope will fructify next year.

Is modern poetry in English a new direction your work is henceforth going to take?

Alarmel Valli: It's not a new direction, in that I am not moving away from anything. We have a wealth of exquisite poems from the past that fascinate and move me and will always continue to do so. "Vigil" is only a new dimension, one that I look forward to developing. Being creative is a continuous process of cutting facets into one's art, as you would with a gem and Arundhati's poem is one such facet. It has given me new grounds to explore and it has been very fulfilling for me to push the envelope, so to speak. There is such joy in working with poetry. I envy a poet's capacity to express ideas in a way that no one else can, to open up our perceptions.

What are your future creative projects?

Alarmel Valli: Next year, I will be choreographing some new productions. One of them, which is still at the conceptual stage, is women-centric and explores different dimensions. I will also be working on a piece that centres around dance as yoga. And, I'll be researching poems of Gurudev and other Bengali poets.

The writer is a noted dancer-researcher

## Ruhul Karim gets SPBA Award



The artiste receives the honours.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruhul Karim Rumi won the Society for Promotion of Bangladesh Art (SPBA) Award. He received a crest, certificate and a cheque worth Taka 80,000. The ceremony was held at Maasranga Television Centre, Banani in the city. The award was announced this year at the 20th National Art Exhibition 2013.

Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad, MP, was present as chief guest at the ceremony and presented the award to artist Ruhul Karim. Anjan Chowdhury, one of the top honchos of Square Group and chairman of SPBA; members of the Board of Governors of SPBA Eltham B Kabir, Mehboob Chowdhury, Syed Nasim Manzur, Anis A Khan; senior painters Syed Jahangir, Hashem Khan, Samarjit Roy Chowdhury, Monirul Islam, Abul Barq Alvi, Dean, the Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA), University of Dhaka; Mohammad Eunus, Professor of Graphic Department, FFA; Samiran Chowdhury, Kanak Champa Chakma, artist Rafi Haq, coordinator of SPBA and others attended the programme.

The Society for Promotion of Bangladesh Art in 2013 introduced the 'SPBA Award' to recognise and honour talented, promising artists for nurturing and inspiring the practice of contemporary art in Bangladesh.

Ruhul Karim's artworks vividly portray human faces, nature and varied objects; visages of varied ages come up in a variety of styles as the faces delineate the saga of human life.

IT'S TRUE!

Summerfest (also known as "The Big Gig") is a yearly music festival held at the 75-acre Henry Maier Festival Park in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the United States. The festival lasts for 11 days, is made up of 11 stages with performances from over 700 bands, and since the mid-1970s has run from late June through early July. Summerfest attracts between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people each year, promoting itself as "The World's Largest Music Festival", a title certified by the Guinness World Records since 1999. Live comedy acts are also a regular attraction since 1975, with noted humourists performing at the festival.

## A Shakespearean Heavy Metal intertwine "The Tragedy of Coriolanus" turns up volume at Edinburgh Festival



If there is music in a production of Shakespeare, it is usually a lute, not a heavy metal band. But a Chinese version of "The Tragedy of Coriolanus", which was staged at the Edinburgh International Festival on Wednesday, turned it up to 11, with two live rock outfits creating the sound and fury of the play's action.

Coriolanus, the story of the heroic Roman general who joins forces with the enemy after being rejected by the "common people", is one of Shakespeare's lesser performed plays.

General Caius Martius returns to Rome after conquering the city of Corioles. But after first swooning over their hero, the citizens turn against the man they have named Coriolanus when the fearless fighter refuses to court the popular opinion of the masses as he runs for political office. Coriolanus is viewed as arrogant and aloof by the people but instead of bending to their pressure he vows to

destroy Rome by mounting an attack along with its enemies.

The Beijing People's Art Theatre, which performs the drama in Mandarin Chinese, with English subtitles, uses the heavy metal bands to portray the ferocity of battle and the rebellion scenes.

The lead role is played by one of China's most famous stage actors, Pu Cunxin. The idea for the production comes from Lin Zhaohua, often described as China's most controversial theatre director. The 77-year-old has been in the vanguard of innovative Chinese drama for four decades but is not someone you would automatically expect to be an expert on rock music. But he says he wanted the loud and aggressive music to match the action on stage. He listened to some German rock bands but the effect of recorded music was "not satisfactory", so he decided the music had to be live.

His set designer recommended he should go to some live shows in pubs in Beijing and that is where they found rock groups Miserable Faith and Suffocated, who will create the battle of the bands on stage in Edinburgh.

The two bands create different sounds, with one offering hardcore metal while the other creates a more expansive progressive rock vibe.

They come out from the wings of the stage to push the action forward as the 100-strong cast creates the riots and battles of Shakespeare's drama.

Pu Cunxin says the music helps to express the hatred and danger within society.

Lin Zhaohua says Coriolanus is seldom performed in Europe and he hoped his production showed the "Orient can perform Shakespeare as well as the Royal Shakespeare Company."

Source: BBC

Scenes from the 4th day of the "Nari Jagoron'er Nattya Ayojon" on Thursday at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. BotTala staged "Khona" (L) -- written by Dr. Samina Luthfa Nitra and directed by Mohammad Ali Haider -- at the Experimental Theatre Hall, while at the National Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy staged "Bideho" (below), written by Shahman Maishan and directed by Lucky Inam.

PHOTO: RIDWAN ADDID RUPON

## Cultural show held in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Amra Ko'jon Shilpi Gosthi arranged a poetry recitation from the works of prominent poets and a dance performance by 50 artistes, on its 25th anniversary at Shaheed Titu Millenayatan of the town last Friday.

A short discussion and the conferment of honours on seven former artistes of the organisation were followed by the cultural programme, presided over by the organisation president Abdus Samad Polash and directed by its secretary Abdul Mobin Jinnah.

The discussants were Deputy Commissioner Safiqur Reja Biswas, Superintendent of Police Mozammel Haque, Rajshahi Divisional Chief of DoE Ali Reja Majid and Sammilito Sangsritik Jote Secretary Ziaul Haque Babla, among others.

The artistes of the organisation presented poetry recitations and dances.



PHOTO: STAR

## NEWS bytes Ben Affleck is the new BATMAN

Ben Affleck will replace Christian Bale as Bruce Wayne in the upcoming untitled Superman-Batman feature for Warner Bros., the studio announced on Thursday. Affleck becomes the eighth actor to play the Caped Crusader, following Bale, George Clooney and Michael Keaton. "We knew we needed an extraordinary actor to take on one of DC Comics' most enduringly popular Super Heroes, and Ben Affleck certainly fits that bill, and then some," WB president Greg Silverman said in a statement. Directed by "Man of Steel" filmmaker Zack Snyder, the Superman-Batman feature will open worldwide on July 17, 2015, with Henry Cavill, Amy Adams and Diane Lane reprising their roles.

Source: TMDB