

WHAT'S ON

Bengal Classical Music Festival
 Organiser: Bengal Foundation
 Venue: Army Stadium, Dhaka
 Date: Nov 28-Dec 1
 Time: 5:30pm-5am

BENGAL CLASSICAL MUSIC FESTIVAL 2013
 Dhaka, Bangladesh
 In association with ITC Sangeet Research Academy

Theatre
 Play: Boshonto Jagoron
 Venue: Nat Mandal, Dhaka University
 Date: Nov 22-28
 Time: 6:30pm

Group Exhibition
 Title: Very Graphic: The Art of Storytelling in Graphic Detail
 Venue: 60 Gulshan Avenue, Circle 1
 Date: Nov 16-Dec 7

Discussion and Musical Soiree
 Organiser: Amra Surjomukhi
 Venue: Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium, National Museum
 Date: Nov 30
 Time: 5pm

10th Anniv of Theatre Troupe Prangonemor
 Venue: Dance and Music Centre, Shilpakala Academy
 Date: Nov 22-29
 Time: 6:30pm

TODAY

WORLD'S BIGGEST CLASSICAL MUSIC FEST

A grand celebration of melody



Scenes from last year's festival: The masterful Ustad Rashid Khan; the audience enjoying the music and the exhibition (right).

PHOTO: ATL AAKASH

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

The sun was just slipping into darkness when our small entourage reached the zamindar palace at Gouripur, Mymensingh. Travelling with us was Irshad Khan, the noted surbahar player of this generation and descendant of the Khan gharana, the legendary court musicians who performed for the royalty in the courts at Gouripur.

As we walked the palace ground ruins, an anticlimactic feeling descended on the group. The dilapidated courtyard looked a forlorn collage of weeds, crumbling walls and faded paint. It seemed as if a proud symbol of heritage and power had been allowed to die an agonised death.

The silent courtyard spoke of the fate of practicing the classical arts in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. What had been the masterful pitch of Ustads reverberating across Mukhtagacha, Gouripur, Dhaka, Comilla, Barisal, Rajshahi and Chittagong had slowly ebbed into hushed echoes. The sitar, pakhwaj, and esraj that had strummed so feverishly side by side with the vocalists had inevitably been orphaned to stillness.

I tried to visualise sitar maestro Ustad Enayet Khan (Irshad Khan's grand-father), legendary Ustad Vilayet Khan's father -- the last of Tansen gharana -- playing a soothing raga for Zamindar Kishore Rai Chowdhury of Gouripur. Tabla maestro Ustad Keramatullah's father and Ustad Wazir Khan -- mentor of Ustad Allaaddin Khan and Hafiz Ali Khan, all permanently trained at Gouripur, would doubtless perform with the Ustads also.

With the fall of the zamindari system, classical musicians lost much of their patronage. Many predicted an untimely demise of the art. In India, to counter this fate, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru -- a music lover himself - made it mandatory to air six hours of classical music on radio everyday. Classical music in Bangladesh was less fortunate. Over decades, the classical arts suffered from lack of patronage and promotion. Slowly, the practice lost its popular appeal and was pushed into the confines of a somewhat elitist circle.

Against this backdrop, the unprecedented warm response to Bengal Foundation's Classical Concert in 2012 caught many by surprise.

Thousands of enthusiasts of all ages descended upon the Army Stadium to listen to all-night performances by the maestros of music, dance and classical instruments. All four nights in a row, not a single seat was left unoccupied.

Bengal's 15 year contract with the leading Indian classical training institute - ITC Sangeet Research Academy - was greeted with mild incredulity when it was signed in 2011. The logistics of providing free admission to fill a 20,000 seat stadium with music lovers listen to an open air performance by over 100 artistes from home and abroad seemed an ambition too far. The success of 2012 was proof of the deep love we seem to have preserved solely for music.

The visionary behind the event, Abul Khair Litu, Chairman of Bengal Foundation, is, as



expected, excited on the eve of the second such Musical Festival to be hosted in Dhaka from November 28-Dec 1. Bengal's vision, according to him, is to embrace classical music in its various forms and make it accessible to all. In short, spark a musical revolution.

The Army Stadium as a venue proved to be a stroke of genius. With its well maintained grounds, huge canopy and on-ground security, it convinced even first timers to make the journey from all parts of the city. An international food court and a well organised staff added to the overall enjoyment.

In many ways, the stadium dons an air of royalty as the concert preparations start again. Gone are the lost empires and courts. Enter the new generation of patrons and music lovers. All one needs is the mindset to immerse oneself in

the sea of music of the ages and be part of the experience as classical maestros at their peak perform their art.

Close your eyes as you listen to Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia draw an image of Krishn on a riverbank playing the tune of eternal love on his flute. Or watch Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma on the Santoor from the Kashmir valleys, strumming the soft sound of water as it glides from the waterfall on to the rugged hilly road.

For those who enjoy vocals, experience the mastery of the open, powerful voice, the broad gamaks, the lightening taans, mellifluous quality of phrasing and the typical style of khayal and thumri execution of Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarti and Ustad Rashid Khan. The enjoyment of listening to the romantic thumri by octogenarian Vidushi Girija Devi under a moon-



lit sky is second to none.

Luva Nahid Choudhury, Director General of Bengal Foundation, has been tirelessly leading the organisational and logistical aspects of the concert. She hopes that the event will provide a much needed exposure to classical music and reignite interest amongst our budding artistes in the art form. With Bengal's push to open music training centers, she hopes the initiative will provide a strong support to students of classical music in the country.

Last year's concert went a long way to diminishing the harsh image of the Gouripur ruins from my mind. The electrifying atmosphere and the raw passion I witnessed amongst the performers and the listeners give me hope for the future. Let us put our hands together and welcome the musical greats into our royal courts.

“The long-run idea (behind organising the festival) is to do something tasteful, and propagate it. If you listen to good music, you would like the ones in your social circle to experience it. This is what can bring a silent cultural revolution in the country. It is the middle and lower-middle class of the society who decide the course of a country; if you can create a cultural awakening among them, you can expect miracles. If you can engage the youth in creative, tasteful activities, crime rates will drop. A person with a taste for arts cannot commit crimes. And these cannot be limited to thoughts; we have to work on it, and that is the path we are walking on.

- Abul Khair
Chairman, Bengal Group

“The discerning Dhaka audience amazed us with its ability to receive, analyse and appreciate classical music (at last year's Bengal ITC-SRA Classical Music Festival). After holding such a successful event, my focus is to retain the standard and excel over the previous event.

- Luva Nahid Choudhury
Director General, Bengal Foundation

“This festival can safely be termed historic. Music was, is and always will be a part of every Bengali household. Ragas like Bilabal and Khamaj have their roots in Bangladesh; people of this country have a lot to be proud of their music.

- Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty
eminent classical vocalist.

Today's performances

- 5:30pm: Group choreography.
- 6pm: Inauguration.
- 7:15pm: Vishal Krishna (Kathak)
- 8:30pm: Vidushi Girija Devi (Vocal)
- 9:45pm: Goutam Sarker, Swarup Hossain, Iftekhar Alam Pradhan Dollar, Zakir Hossain (Tabla quartet)
- 10:30pm: Ayan Sengupta (Sitar)
- 11:30pm: Vidushi Kaushiki Chakravarty (Vocal)
- 1:30am: Pandit Tejendra Narayan Majumdar (Sarod)
- 3:15am: Pandit Rajan Mishra and Pandit Sajan Mishra.



Getting to the festival

Bengal Foundation has arranged for a number of buses to transport music-lovers to the festival from various parts of Dhaka, and return services as well. The buses will be plying on six routes: Abdullahpur-Khilkhet, Maniknagar-Basabo-Badda-Gulshan, Farmgate-Mohakhali, Jigatola-Dhanmondi 27-Manik Miya Avenue, Mirpur 12-Mirpur 2-Shyamoli-Farmgate and Mirpur 12-

Mirpur 10-Sheorapara-Taltola and the same route for return. The buses will leave the pick-up points at 4pm everyday, and return at the close of every day's performance. However, the transport service will be unavailable in case of hartal at the mentioned time.

Anyone willing to avail the bus service must show the print-out of their registration form.

ARTISTES MEET THE PRESS

(From left): Bangladeshi sitarist Reenat Fauzia, tabla maestro Pandit Samar Saha, eminent classical vocalist Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty, sarod legend Pandit Tejendra Narayan Majumdar and Bangladesh classical vocalist Asit Dey at a press conference, held yesterday at the Westin Hotel in Dhaka marking the second installment of Bengal Classical Music Festival 2013, scheduled to open today at Army Stadium, Dhaka. Singer-journalist Nobonita Chowdhury directed the press meet. Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty termed the festival the worlds biggest of its kind, in terms of the number of audiences.

PHOTO: RIDWAN ADID RUPON

The stage is set

In conversation with Blues Communications CEO Farhadul Islam

FAHMIM FERDOUS

Blues Communications is the event organiser of the Bengal Classical Music Festival 2013 (BCMF '13) and a team of energetic, focused individuals have been working hard for months now to present a spotless grand musical experience to tens of thousands of eager people who have registered for it. Farhadul Islam, CEO of the organisation, spoke to The Daily Star on the preparation of BCMF '13.

How are last-minute preparations going?

Farhad: It's all pretty much done; we're now putting up the finishing touches. The light, sound and other arrangements have all been completed; the stalls are being put up. I'm happy with the way things are going.

What are you improving in terms of facilities and amenities from last time?

Farhad: We have renovated all the washrooms at the Army Stadium in the last one week. Since it's a long-running festival, we want people to be comfortable here. The food court has increased in size and there are more options this time around. We've set up a media centre to facilitate better service to journalists and smoother media management. The number of buses has been increased to accommodate a bigger audience flow. Most importantly, we have increased both the size and number of the screens at different parts of the ground so that no one misses the action on stage. Plus, we have worked hard on the entire look and feel of the festival premises; I am positive the audience will really like it.

What were your biggest challenge(s) along the course?

Farhad: Apart from the political situation which has been a little hostile lately, we haven't really faced any big obstacle. However, last time, people did not believe that such a festival can be held at this magnitude. But this year, people have expectations from it based on last year's experience, and our biggest motivation was not just to reach them, but to go beyond. It has gone very well so far; we're now waiting to open the gates to a wonderful festival.



The entire stadium is set to take a new look this evening.

PHOTO: RIDWAN ADID RUPON

