

MUSICAL FLAIR OF LALON

Pulsating through the shackles of the ordinary and the conventional styles of folk music, Lalon is a band with folk-rock fusion music style, named after and mostly influenced by Fakir Lalon Shah. The Band has earned huge popularity in recent times and is committed to spreading Bengali folk music worldwide and represents the Baul spirit through their works. Read on to find out more about these upcoming stars and the roots of their band: Lalon.



COVER STORY



Julkar Nain (Ratul)



Ashfaque Ahmed (Turjo)



Rafi Islam

MEMBERS

Rafi Islam: Student of BBA at NSU, Guitarist of Lalon for 1.5 years. **Nigar Sultana (Sumi):** Vocal at Lalon, Professional musician.

Julkar Nain (Ratul): Guitarist for 2 years. **Thein Han Maung (Titi):** Drummer and manager since 2007.

Ashfaque Ahmed (Turjo): Bassist.

How did Lalon start?

We have been singing since childhood. Sumi's whole family are musicians, folk singers mainly, although none of them are professionals apart from her and her elder brother. She learned from her ustads in classical music in her youth and she won the first prize in folk category on divisional and national levels five times in a row. This made her realize her talents and in 2003 won the Benson & Hedges Star Search. Hence, Lalon started and started working for our first album back in 2006 in Dhaka. Sumi did not always have plans to make a band, but influences from her childhood bands and the band revolution of the 90's inspired them to form the band, in addition to the band Bangla and Anusheh.

Why did you choose the works of Lalon Shah as the focus of your band?

Sumi: I've been singing his songs since my childhood, and his songs and words moved me since then. I listened to the works of Rabindranath, Nazrul and the others. I like them as well, but they don't draw me in as the words of Lalon Shah do. So since then, we have added some original tracks to our albums but the works of Lalon Shah are mostly covered in our works. **Titi:** If we look into the musical heritage of the past century, we can see that Tagore, Nazrul geeti and folk are the most influential. The first two, you will notice, are more prevalent among the affluent and privileged classes whereas the folk genres like Lalon Shah are more prevalent among the lower echelons of society and features the differences and their pleas more heavily, which is what drew us as well.

In case of Tagore and Nazrul geeti, there is a matter of being true to its form, and performing to the prescribed manner of the works. Are there such limitations for folk music as well? Is experimentation frowned upon in the case of Lalon Shah's works?

Sumi: It may be an issue in the urban setting for folk purists who believe that the works should be replicated as they were. However, the true bauls and followers of Lalon Shah, many of whom I



Thein Han Maung (Titi)



Nigar Sultana (Sumi)

have met in my travels, do not seem to care for it. **Titi:** The struggle between the old and the new is always there in every aspect of the world, and the world of music is no different. The youth and the newcomers usually prevail at the end. Lalon Shah did not restrict his works. Folk is an open medium, and they have been passed on vocally over the years with nothing written down, even though one of the close friends of Lalon Shah was a newspaper writer of the area at that time. The works of folk artists have evolved over time and it keeps on evolving. We see our work as a step in the evolutionary process and that's how music survives over the centuries. As long as the foundations and the messages of the lyrics remain unchanged, the works will live on among the people in various forms. There will always be controversy about experimenting with established mediums, but ultimately people will end up accepting our fusion.

What is in store for the future of the Band Lalon?

In this globalization process, we plan to represent and glorify Bangladesh on the world stage. We have performed internationally in quite a

few instances. The first show was in London, England where there was a Boishakhi Mela organized by the expat community there. We have performed a few times in Kolkata and the people there have received us very well. We also performed at a music festival in Sri Lanka, and it was a realization for us that music has a universal language as all the attendees there were non-Bangladeshi. The biggest opportunity we had was in 2014, where we performed at the launch of a United Nations campaign, where UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon was there. It was a very prestigious program for us, and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs picked us to perform there, and we had to perform at the UN headquarters in New York.

We have two upcoming albums, one titled "Shadakalo", which will have all original works by the band. Another project "A Tribute to Fakir Lalon Shah" will feature only works by Fakir Lalon Shah, hopefully in the upcoming Pohela Boishak.

Interviewed by Rafi Hossain &
Narrated by Mobaiminul Islam