



LS SPECIAL

Stepping into the jazz scene: A listener's guide

Often we find that popular music, or the 'pop scene' as we know it, is just not enough to feed the soul in a manner we might need. Dub-step infused EDM, repetitive reggaeton remixes or 'hood'-centred rap dominates the top charts week after week; but the heart craves something more, on a different note. Jazz however is not the first thing or even the tenth thing on a light listener's list, but once in a while it works its magic as a palate cleanser (or in this case as an aural cleanser!)

For the musically inclined, jazz includes instruments like the piano, guitars, saxophone and drums; that's also where the thought process staggers to a halt. Not that many jazz artists and bands are known in this part of the modern world, but the denizens of Dhaka are not that much in the dark either.

ALL ABOUT JAZZ IN DHAKA

The city's music scene is taking baby steps in jazz appreciation. This year alone saw two events so far — The Jazz and Blues Fest held in January and the International Jazz Day Concert in April. Dhaka has on an on-and-off basis hosted various Jazz and Blues concerts since late 2000s, but the most notable year was 2015, which was the "Big Year of Concerts" for Dhaka.

Jazz as a genre made its own place in the hearts of the audience as international artists like John McLaughlin, China Moses, VasundharaVidalur (only a handful out of the many performers) introduced their own style and twist of the genre. Names like Miles Davis and B B King are no longer unfamiliar to the new aficionados!



Since its beginning jazz allows for improvisation and is enhanced by the performer's capacity to play on with a solo segment. It encourages fusion with any and all styles, from 'the blues' to 'swing to rag-time' to 'folk' to even 'rock', jazz has really "been there and done that." So it should come as no wonder that almost every musically inclined country has adopted jazz into its music scene.

Bangladesh too has embraced it as the younger musical talents are stepping up to add their touch in this widely adaptable style of music.

Rushnaf Wadud, one of the performers in this year's International Jazz Day Concert, feels that jazz is one of the most acquired tastes in music. As part of an alternative rock band, he mentions that no performing artist can truly live up to the dynamism that comes from live performances without taking a page from jazz.

Another notable name in the local young jazz scene is Imran Ahmed. With three International Jazz Day events under his belt, he is prepping for the next ones to come. As one of the initiators of this UNESCO acknowledged event, he mentions how Dhaka's audiences have come to appreciate the subtleties of tones that can only be heard in jazz. Although the audience still needs some seasoning, things are getting better!

The contrast of the immense energy of the crowd and the silence when a performance takes place is itself an added element to the performance.



While on the topic of jazz, it's not just western, across-the-pond music that awaits the crowds. Jazz fusion is taking place in the Bangladeshi music scenario just like any other musically inclined country. Singers like Armeen Musa (a performer in this year's Jazz and Blues Fest), Mehreen

Mahmud (one of the judges in Bangladeshi Idol back in 2012) are all contributing to the 'Bangla-jazz fusion-pop' genre. While pure jazz itself can become a calling for performers and listeners, it also allows for incorporation of one's own music and style to make way for the new and the old.

Being a jazz lover in Dhaka now no longer means secluded evenings and a stack of cherished CDs. Music lovers can enjoy live performances from International as well as local talent as concerts and music events are taking place in a never-before experienced magnitude.

Other than large concerts, the bands themselves are making full use of social media and radio for their news and announcements. Keeping an eye and ear out, a jazz lover in Dhaka is no longer far away from his or her listening pleasures!

JAZZ IS ALL AROUND

Modern music critics have often mentioned that the best thing of the US music scene is jazz and its many sub-genres and styles. Rock, one of the single most power pumping genres in music, owes its existence to 'the blues', which is almost inseparable from jazz. And it does not even stop for an eighth note there!