



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

THE WEEKENDER

“It's time for me to learn how to swim”

...NEELANJONA NEELA

ROBINA RASHID BHUIYAN

Badrul Anam Saud's debut film “Gohin Baluchor”, slated to release in December, offers more than the promise of a compelling romance set against the pristine backdrop of sandy shores meeting crystal-line rivers. The film involves a cast of newcomers making their first forays into the silver screen, including Neelanjona Neela who is also a relatively new face on the small screen. In a recent interview with The Daily Star, the actress shares her experiences on the set, and more.

How do you normally spend weekends?

Neela: I spend as much time as I can with my family, and catch up on my reading. We like going out, whether it be to the movies or otherwise.

What challenges did you have to overcome while filming “Gohin Baluchor”?

Neela: I entered into this film with an acting background in television, and it was a whole new dimension altogether. We had a three-month grooming period to prepare ourselves to the best of our abilities, but we aren't accustomed to spending extended periods of times outdoors. We spent a great deal of time in the sandy char areas, where we didn't have access to a washroom. I learned to cope on boats, and also to appreciate many different kinds of fish during my time on the sets.

Which three words best describe you?

Neela: Loyal, good, and emotional.

Is there a skill you would like to learn?

Neela: After spending a great deal of time being surrounded by water during the filming of “Gohin Baluchor”, I think it's finally time for me to learn how to swim.

As an actress, who do you look up to as a role model?

Neela: Suborna Mustafa is my idol; I wanted to be like her while I was growing up. I love and greatly admire Bipasha Hayat and Jaya Ahsan as well.

Vivid retelling of classic romance

Javed Akhtar-Shabana Azmi enthrall with “Kaifi Aur Main”

FAHMIM FERDOUS

We all tell stories. It's quite amazing something so mundane and common-place in our lives can be such an art when done by the right persons. On Wednesday at the capital's KIB Auditorium, two masters of the craft held a small but discerning audience captive for nearly two hours with a simple yet enchanting story of love between two people. Shabana Azmi and Javed Akhtar, two gems of Indian cinema and literature, presented “Kaifi Aur Main” – a theatrical narrative of the life and love of Shabana's parents Kaifi Azmi and Shaukat Kaifi. Jaswinder Singh's smooth ghazal vocals interspersed the story with songs written by Kaifi Azmi.

The play, if it can be called one, opens with an intro to a memoir, “Yaad Ki Rehguzar” by Shaukat Kaifi. Shabana Azmi and Javed Akhtar, sitting next to each other on separate reading tables, assume the personas of Shaukat and Kaifi Azmi in precisely-interjected intervals and take the audience through the duo's early lives, encounter, falling in love, beginning a life together, struggles of being a part of the progressive Indian



The inimitable duo: Shabana Azmi and Javed Akhtar on stage.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

movement in the '40s and '50s, and final days.

The performance is a combination of two streams: Shaukat Kaifi's fond remembrance of their 55-year romance, right down from the first time they met to their tumultuous days of long-distance romance, to their marriage and struggles together right

down to Kaifi Azmi's death. All this is taken from her memoir, and thus is one coherent story. The part enacted by Javed Akhtar is a little trickier, as it combines excerpts from his interviews and letters written to his wife, chronicling mostly his personal background, philosophies and vision. Akhtar, who himself wrote “Kaifi Aur Main”, and

director Ramesh Talwar put this part together beautifully to the point it feels almost as seamless as the other half, expertly interjecting recitation of Kaifi's poems and his songs to create a wholesome story.

The result is a fluid narrative oozing romance and spirit, from young fluttering hearts to taking difficult life decisions together, and riding the waves of success and failure, good and bad fortune, bliss and depression. Kaifi Azmi was a renowned Urdu poet and was influential enough to introduce Urdu literature to Hindi cinema so his writing prowess is beyond question, but it is Shaukat Kaifi's writing that is a pleasant surprise. It is her attention to detail and the expressive nature of her writing is what makes “Kaifi Aur Main” a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

It should come as no surprise that Blues Communications is the company behind bringing such a production to Dhaka; they have been holding culturally and artistically rich events in the country and abroad for a good while now, and continues to provide the Dhaka audience with opportunities of such unique performances.

“Theatre cannot be confined by borders”

In conversation with Nazanin Sahamizaeh



A scene from Verbatim's play “Manus”.

AMIR HASAN SHAHRIAR, Chittagong

Nazanin Sahamizaeh is a theatre activist from Iran and director of the play “Manus”, staged by Iranian theatre group Verbatim on October 23 at the International Theatre Festival in Chittagong. The festival was organised by Nandimukh at the Chittagong Shilpakala Academy auditorium. The play showcased the global crisis induced by powerful nations over immigrants and refugees, and some national practices from Iran's perspective.

The Daily Star had an opportunity to interview the Nazanin after the show. Excerpts:

Which province in Iran is your team from?

Nazanin: We are from Tehran.

What degree of freedom does theatre have in Iran?

Nazanin: Theatre, in theory, cannot be confined by borders. It can transcend borders and cannot be limited at all (laughs).

Saying that, are your political plays like “Manus” also for a global audience?

Nazanin: “Manus” is a very person-oriented play. After the first public performance, many of our political parties did not support it. So, we need to keep global audiences in mind. To be honest, we don't need any political support.

Does it mean you don't care what the authorities think of your plays?

Nazanin: We respect everyone. But we do our job.

Are Iranians big theatre-goers?

Nazanin: The audience is growing. They are now

more interested in theatre than they were before, although the situation is not the same in other cities. Tehran is more progressive than other parts of Iran in terms of arts and culture.

Is this your first visit to Bangladesh?

Nazanin: Yes. It is also our first performance outside Iran.

Can you share your experiences here?

Nazanin: Though we did not get enough time to see the country, the people we met here were very warm and wonderful.

What was the thought behind naming the troupe Verbatim?

Nazanin: The word verbatim means word for word. We like to tell the story of every person word by word in our play, and that is our motto.

Can you tell us about the conceptualisation of “Manus”?

Nazanin: We wish it could change something. The play lets you to be in the position of a mother, a daughter, a father and a person who had been actually there. So, you can put yourself in their shoes to experience the same pain they have gone through, at least a bit of it.

What is your experience of the theatre audience in Bangladesh?

Nazanin: The energy of audiences in Bangladesh is very good. Though, everyone in the audience may not have understood our play completely, they were very responsive during the show. Their appreciation of theatre is very good. At the festival it was a joy to see how much people love and value theatre.



THE RISE OF ABM SUMON

NAZIBA BASHER

Still running successfully in theatres in its fourth week, Dipankar Dipon's cop thriller “Dhaka Attack” is a flame yet to be extinguished. ABM Sumon's performance as SWAT leader Ashfaque in the film was one that caught attention of the audience. Transitioning from modelling to acting early on, Sumon now aspires to become a method actor. In conversation with The Daily Star, the rising star shares his stories of struggle and success.

Tell us about your transition from modelling to acting.

Sumon: I came to Dhaka from Australia in 2011. I didn't have much to do then, and spent a lot of my time at the gym. The owner of the gym advised me to try modelling, and gave some photos of mine to his friends who worked in the industry. I got my first ramp show, and moved forward from then on. I began acting in 2013 with a tele-film called “Megher Kole Roud”.

Growing up in Australia, was it hard for you to make your way into the industry?

Sumon: I had to remake myself entirely. I had to lose 10kgs when I was modelling. I stopped speaking in English for a whole year, and I am still trying to do everything I can to become a method actor, and doing that is about simplifying yourself. Humayun Faridee was perhaps the greatest method actor we had, and he was the simplest man you would come across.

How many films have you done so far?

Sumon: After the tele-film, my first full-length film was “Ochena Hridoy”, and then “Rudo: The Gangster”. “Dhaka Attack” is my third released film, and we have completed shooting for Taneem Rahman Angshu's “Aadi”.

Did you expect the character of Ashfaque to become such an audience favourite?

Sumon: I think it was the emotions embodied by the character. He is a loving husband, about to become a father. Sunny Sanwar, the writer of the film, went through similar experiences and if he didn't share those with me, I may not have done as well as I did. “Dhaka Attack” was the fruition of hard work. I halted all other projects which put me in a tough spot financially and added a lot of mental stress. But it was all worth it.

Who would you credit with your success in “Dhaka Attack”?

Sumon: I credit my performance to three people: director Dipankar Dipon, who is just a wonderful craftsman; Sunny Sanwar, whose real life experiences helped me become Ashfaque, and then there's Nawshaba, who plays my wife. She was always in character, which helped me make every situation in the film believable.

Taskeen Rahman, another breakout star of “Dhaka Attack”, is related to you. What was it like working together?

Sumon: Taskeen is my cousin and best friend. We always have a great time on set together and usually share a room. After his performance in “Dhaka Attack”, I'm a fan! Taskeen is definitely a gift to the industry.

What work do you have in the pipeline?

Sumon: Taneem Rahman Angshu's “Aadi” has been shot, but the release date hasn't been finalised. “Aadi” is my most precious project. I worked the hardest and went through a lot of physical hurdles for it. I tore my left knee ligament during shooting, and still suffer from the pain. We all worked immensely hard for it, and have high hopes for the film.

Tell us a little about the reaction you have received from fans.

Sumon: I have received so many loving messages. One of the messages said if I were to sit for the BCS exams, they have a job ready for me! I'm not too fond of the word ‘fan’ -- ‘admirer’ maybe is a better term. But those who received Ashfaque and “Dhaka Attack” so well, they are my biggest inspiration right now.

Streak-Anandadhara Hairstyling Competition awards winners

A CORRESPONDENT

On October 25, the Streak-Anandadhara Hairstyling competition came to an end through awarding its winners. The programme was graced by its judges Afroza Parveen and Kamrul Islam along with representatives from Streak: Shahid Kabir, Samreen Hasan and Sadia Islam. The panel also featured prominent actress and singer Swagata, and the guests included celebrities Jyotika Jyoti, Rukhsana Ali Hera and many more. Mahfuz Anam, Editor and publisher of The Daily Star started the programme with a hearty welcome address, which was followed by a speech by Rafi Hossain, the editor of Anandadhara.

The winners of the photography segment were: Md Zahid Hasan, Sadman Saqib Shanto and Ali Aushjahi Rufai and the winners of the make-up and hairstyling contest were Nisa Hai, Lia Naz Ahmed and Segufta Azmi. Mahfuz Anam handed the awards to the winners.

