



RASTAK

Rastak is an ensemble for contemporary Persian Folk music which was formed as an experimental music group in 1997. The group seeks to collect, record and interpret traditional Persian folk music for the global audience. This time, they are here in Bangladesh to attend the Dhaka International Folk Fest 2017.

What is the meaning of the word 'Rastak'?

In Farsi, Rastak means a newly born plant that grows at the bottom of the tree. Sometimes it grows to be taller and stronger than the main tree itself. So, the interpretation can be, it is like a plant that has its roots in the ground but when it is big it contains all the essential elements of life. Like Rastak, we have borrowed the background of our music from the roots of its history and culture. For years we have been using music to be able to connect with greater range of audiences from all over the world.

Since when are you performing as a band?

It has been nearly two decades of our singing career. We all have grown up together. Initially, the band consisted of four people including the players and the vocalists. Gradually, we grew in quality and quantity. Today most of us are university graduates with a major in music.

Do you prefer performing folk songs

only? What kind of instruments do you like to use?

We have long and rich experiences in working with folk music. Each region in Iran has its own language, history, and dialect sometimes. This experience also includes exposure to the film, theatre and electronic music. Sometimes, our songs can be termed as fusion as well. We have a wide range of ethnic groups in Iran. Each one is flourished with its own tradition, culture and musical background. So, we have blended all these elements to voice our own musical expression. The range of instruments varies from region to region. To have all the elements incorporated, we use various kinds of instruments in folk songs. This makes our work complicated and sometimes very hard for the sound engineers!

How do you incorporate such diversity in your music in order to promote traditions of different regions?

For us the situation is like a double-edged sword. There are two risks here. The first

risk is about the disappearance of certain musical pieces. And the second risk is about giving every song their deserved functionality. That is why we take the responsibility of preserving these songs from sinking. In the process of doing so, we always have to remember that there are people to whom these pieces belong. They expect these to remain unaltered and unchanged. So, after reproducing the song we are ready for the reactions we get. Since each of us comes from different regions, we are familiar with the limitations of different cultures. That is why we have our consultants to make sure we keep the songs authentic and original.

Collecting folk songs is a tough job because you have to go to the root of the music and take it back unaltered.

How difficult you find the job to be? The main focus of our job is to be functional about music. We investigate and research about a culture before making renditions of their songs. Our main chal-

lenge is to increase the functionality of the songs. When we see that a musician's work has been forgotten, we grab that and reproduce it in a way so that it stays alive. We have an eye on what exists already and what else can be done to make folk songs more functional.

What are the challenges you faced in terms of preserving folk songs for nearly two decades?

The biggest challenge in Iran about folk music is that it is being pushed away by the universal force of modern life. We believe many other nations are also being confronted with this danger. The most important job for all the folk singers is to come up with expressions in order to stop this process and keep them alive. For us, keeping these songs from dying was the first challenge. The second challenge was to come up with ways to fit the songs into modern culture so that people keep these songs in their everyday playlist.