

# Why this year's BCMF was more significant than you realise

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*The Bengal Classical Music Festival just completed is sixth edition on the dawn of December 31, and as has been the case in the last five years, brought pretty much every cultured mind in the capital (and some from beyond) to one place for five nights of bliss. But it's safe to say this year's festival will be remembered for a few more reasons than the past ones. Here are the biggest of them:*

**A New Home**  
After the festival's cancellation was announced in October due to the Army Stadium -- the venue of the festival since its birth -- not being allotted to Bengal Foundation this year, it sent shockwaves in the country's cultural arena. After a month's lull the Abahani ground was secured as a venue, but apprehensions were aplenty: is it big enough? Will it have enough bathrooms? Can a traffic catastrophe in the dense residential area be averted? Will the nearby houses and hospitals be safe from loud sounds throughout the night? The answer to all of them: A resounding yes. In fact, many attendees said they prefer this venue over the Army Stadium, and with Abahani Club's interest (as voiced by Amina Ahmed, mother of the club's vice chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed in her speech on the closing day) it looks very likely that those audience members might get their wish.

**A Blessing in Disguise**  
Turns out, having to relocate to a new venue was, rather counter-intuitively, good for the festival. Event managers Blues Communications had to build almost every structure up from the ground, as they had pretty much a blank slate of land, but it allowed them to design everything according to plan. According to Bengal Foundation chair Abul Khair, the Abahani field has 100,000 square feet more usable space than the Army Stadium, and it showed in the arrangement. The food stalls and food court, the pavilions of Bengal Foundation's sister organisations were designed and placed well, and the main seating area was also expanded from previous years. The 50+ public restrooms, built only for the festival, were also more spacious and conveniently-accessible, as efficient were the



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

**The Astana Symphony Philharmonic Orchestra's collaboration with Dr. L Subramaniam was one of the highlights of the festival (top); everyone got to enjoy the festival as they wanted, be it sitting in the VIP area or laying back on a floor mat.**

entry gates. The overall atmosphere was more relaxed, especially on the more crowded last two days. The idea of having ample floor mats for audience members to arrange their own picnic-like gatherings and chairs that could be moved and placed in circles gave it the look and feel of major

international music festivals.

**Ever-Expanding Boundaries**

The festival had drawn in audiences in tens of thousands since its first edition, but Bengal Foundation has never been complacent about it; every year there is something new at the festival to look forward to, whether it's a

legendary artiste, new instruments or new musical styles (like combinations and forms of instrumental and vocal jugabandi). This year, the organisers decided to go further -- by bringing in a full Philharmonic Orchestra to give attendees a taste of Western Classical Music in blend with Indian classical. The 58-

member Astana Symphony Philharmonic Orchestra no less than opened the festival, and played in conjunction with virtuoso violinist Dr. L Subramaniam creating a gorgeous soundscape of harmony. While there were other new elements to the festival including the Mohan Veena, the cello playing Indian classical music and a dance company, the symphonic orchestra proved that Bengal Foundation is far from out of new ideas.

**A Testament of Strength**

The Bengal Classical Music Festival had gone on without facing any major hurdles in its first five years; this year an obstacle so big arose that it had to be initially scrapped. The organisers usually work for seven-eight months to put the festival in place. This year, they had just over a month (with the venue confirmed on November 14), within which they had to re-plan it, relocate it to a new venue, set that venue up, get dates from all the artistes at the busiest time of year for classical musicians, arrange for all their flights, accommodations, get all the security and government permissions and a thousand other things that go behind organising a festival of its magnitude. When it was cancelled, Bengal Foundation said they had to do so because they do not want to curtail the festival in its size and scope, and after given the permissions and support from the government they showed that they have the dedication, professionalism and resources to give the audience an unforgettable festival no matter how high the odds are stacked against them. It will give Bengal Foundation, and the music-loving audience of the country, great confidence to overcome those odds, and to take this festival to even greater heights in coming years.



## Apurbo under a new spotlight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the plethora of television broadcasting stations in the country, there is no shortage of small screen entertainment on offer. However, it also means there are far too many plays and drama serials being made, and over time they fade from memory as they get replaced by new ventures each year. However, one tele-film has made a remarkable impact on the audience last yera, and created a buzz unlike any other TV venture in recent years.

"Boro Chele", an Eid TV special released late last year, struck a chord with viewers as they watched Apurbo play the character of a sacrificing elder son. Since its release, the play generated 12 million views on YouTube, a feat unlike anything seen before. Apurbo, despite being a leading actor of the small screen for some years now, is under a new spotlight this year.

"Even today, people bring up 'Boro Chhele' whenever they see me. The play has definitely been my highlight of this year," stated Apurbo. The actor was also featured in a few other plays which were well received by the audience.

Despite quality programmes being made every year, "Boro Chhele" leads us to question how a TV venture can be good enough to stand out from the rest. For Apurbo, the answer is deceptively simple: "Every component that goes into producing a play must be good; in addition to a strong narrative, the characters must be compelling. You need a talented director with vision in order to execute it to perfection. You would also need the budget to be able to explore the script in any capacity you can. And lastly, a strong cast that remains memorable in people's minds."

With such a tremendous achievement marking 2017, Apurbo is optimistic about the New Year. "I am not one to set ambitious goals, I like to live each day at a time and take things as they come," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

## Jaya off to a great start this year

"Putro" hits the big screens today

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

National Film Award-winning actor Jaya Ahsan is one of the busiest artistes of her time. Her hard work and determination earned laudable success in not just her motherland, but also India's West Bengal. Jaya is the leding lady of this year's first film release, in a venture titled "Putro", releasing in theatres today.

Helmed by Saiful Islam Mannu and produced by the department of film and publications, Jaya takes control of the screen as a school teacher.

"I am very selective about film ventures, and the story of 'Putro' and the role I was offered, touched my soul," stated Jaya.

On the other side of the border, the actor is busy filming for a biopic based on the poet Jibananda Das' life titled "Jhora Palok". Directed by Shayantan Mukhopadhyay, Jaya is set to appear in the role of Labonno, the poet's wife. "I believe that this film is going to add something very new to my career," said Jaya.

This year seems to be looking up already for the actor, who had a very fruitful 2017. Jaya Ahsan came into Kolkata's limelight with her performance in "Bishorjon", which earned her numerous awards.

The artiste is also cast as Bhawal Raja's sister in a film directed by Srijit Mukherjee titled "Bhawal Sannyashi", which is slated to film in Bangladesh. "I can't give more details as the filming dates have not been set yet," she informed.

Though Jaya Ahsan has her acting roots on the small screen, the actor has solely focused on films for some years now. She earned National Film Awards for her roles in the films "Purno Doirgho Prem Kahini" and "Zero Degree". In Kolkata, she rose to stardom with her roles in "Ekti Bangali Bhooter Golpo", "Eagle er Chokh", "Rajkahini", "Bhalobashar Shohor" and "Bishorjon".



## CATE BLANCHETT named Cannes jury president

Cate Blanchett has been named president of the Cannes Film Festival jury, the festival announced Wednesday. Blanchett will be the 12th woman to lead the jury of the prestigious festival.

The Australian actress will preside over the competition for the 71st festival, which takes place May 8 to May 19. Unlike in years past, this year the festival begins on a Tuesday and ends on a Saturday.

"I have been to Cannes in many guises over the years; as an actress, producer, in the marketplace, the Gala-sphere and in Competition," she said in a statement, "but never solely for the sheer pleasure of watching the cornucopia of films this great festival harbors."

Blanchett was among the women who recently launched the Time's Up initiative against sexual harassment. She was one of the first women to speak out against Harvey Weinstein after he was accused of sexual assault by numerous

women.

Last year's president was Pedro Almodovar, whose jury gave the Palme d'Or to Ruben Ostlund's "The Square."

"I am humbled by the privilege and responsibility of presiding over this year's jury," she continued. "This festival plays a pivotal role in bringing the world together to celebrate story; that strange and vital endeavour that all peoples share, understand and crave."

Pierre Lescure, Festival de Cannes President and Thierry Frémaux, General Delegate, said: "We are delighted to welcome such a rare and unique artiste whose talent and convictions enrich both screen and stage. Our conversations from this autumn tell us she will be a committed President, a passionate woman and a big-hearted spectator."

Blanchett won the 2014 best actress Oscar for "Blue Jasmine" as well as the supporting actress Oscar for "The Aviator" in 2004.

Source: **Variety**