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Another significant change in latest classical festival was the introduction of a big contingent of Bangladeshi performers. In earlier instances, we saw students of Bengal Parampara Sangeetalaya perform but this time around, the performances of students of Government Music College and a dance troupe comprising several groups were quite impressive. Of special note were the dance numbers whose quality was definitely something to feel confident about. Classical dance needs greater patronisation in Bangladesh and this festival clearly showed what results we can get if we do.

To say the obvious, it was a team effort. From the very sophisticated to the utter mundane, the organisers factored in everything—from toilets (more than 40 temporary ones were installed and I overheard several women thanking the Foundation's chair for providing adequate ones for ladies which they said is not often the case), to food stalls, to the ever-vigilant garbage collectors who saw to it that every leftover coffee cup and discarded tissue paper from VIP seats was removed and mosquito-repellent coils from under every other seat replaced timely, practically nothing seems to have escaped the organiser's detailed planning and the beauty of it was that all of this work was done with



Over 50,000 in attendance enjoying the festival

charm, patience and a disarming smile.

But of course it was the crowd that must receive our biggest praise. An average turnout of 34,000-40,000 persons per night for five nights with the final performance by Chaurasia topping 45,000 at 3:30 in a wintry morning is something no other festival can match and one that made ours the world's biggest. By far, the majority of this audience were young, naturally devoted to this finest form of our music tradition, disciplined and highly attentive to the renditions of the maestros as evidenced by their timely

appreciative applause that often appeared to take those seating in the VIP section by surprise. Of course there were many exceptions.

As we praise the team, so also we must credit the leadership of Bengal Foundation for giving us this annual journey to excellence in music. A round of special thanks has to be given to the Foundation's chair, Abul Khair Litu to all, for his incredible perseverance. The delay and the running from pillar to post, and the humiliation that it entailed would have sapped any other normal mortal's

energy and enthusiasm. But Abul Khair slogged on saying that he did not want Bangladesh to lose the accolade of hosting the biggest classical music festival in the world and that such festivals must be held every year; otherwise world-class musicians lose confidence and hesitate to commit their time. Seeing up-close how he dealt with perennial obstacles that continued to come his way, maintained his equanimity, and held on to his familiar smile, there has to be a special word of praise for him.

Luva Nahid Choudhury, the incredible, never-tiring, ever-efficient organiser of the rarest kind, did an unbelievable job of getting all these world-class artists to recommit to come to the Bengal Festival even after we messed up their schedules, sometimes at considerable financial losses to them. We all need to compliment her and her team for this magnificent festival, with special thanks to Farhadul Islam for the technical excellence, Zeenat Chowdhury for immaculate organisation and Tahmida Afroze for the amazing architectural design of the festival premises.

Through this festival and some others, like the Folk Festival, we have proven to the skeptics that extremism, parochialism, and cultural exclusivism have no place in Bangladesh based on the values of our Liberation War.



Astana Symphony Philharmonic Orchestra



Vidushi Padma Talwalkar



Flute by Pandit Ronu Majumdar and Sarod by Pandit Debojyoti Bose