

CENTRE STAGE

ABRAR ATHAR

With unraveled zeal to take Bangladeshi film industry to greater heights, Abrar Athar, a young creative director has made his mark by taking his short film, 'Life in Other Words' to renowned international competitions. His work has been compared to filmmakers like Wes Anderson and Fernando Ferreira Meirelles by reviewers of his film. He is the founder of 'Medium Rare' and 'Little Big Films'. In a candid interview with Star Showbiz, Abrar shared his passionate journey as a director.

Which productions and institutions are you related to?

I am the guy behind quite a few commercials that have been done from Little Big Films with the help of *Khelna Chobi* and later, *Half Stop Down*. I have written and directed *Life in Other Words*, a short film available on multiple platforms around the world including *Amazon Prime*, *Shorts TV* and other curated sites. I am also the writer and director for *Koli 2.0*.

When did you start working with 'Little Big Films'?

I am the founder and creative director of *Little Big Films*. I think it's been about two years but who's counting?

Who inspired you to make this project?

My wife and my brother-in-law are the ones who motivated me and really always pushed me towards this. I also don't like rules and work best on my own. The people, who laughed me off initially and never believed in my vision, really inspired me to start *Little Big Films* and today we are a happy, "healthy-arrogant" company that goes that extra mile, works that extra hour, sacrifices that extra buck just so we get it done the *Little Big* way!

What was your experience like while working for 'Life in Other Words' and 'Koli 2.0'?

The experience was nerve wracking, wonderful and intimidating. *Life in Other Words* was my debut short film as a director and people had no idea what to expect. I'm very particular about things, but I was fortunate to have great colleagues like Tuhin Tamijul, Yasir, Nuhash and Esha, who really helped me stay true to my vision. On the other hand, *Koli 2.0*, which was much more mainstream, was where I felt we really broke the norms for Bangla VOD and I am grateful to Saniat Hossain for his support, and to actors like Nusrat Imrose Tisha, Nawaf Nasser and Baizid Haque Joarder who gave outstanding performances. It has drugs, violence, profanity and everything that could cause backlash, but we made it work, so I am really proud of it. I think the sequel will be one to watch out for and Irfan Sajjad has promised a performance of a lifetime!

What is your most favorite scene from 'Life in Other Words'?

The whole flashback sequence and the ending track. The cast were not aware that we were shooting and the reactions were perfect. Also the Aanon fighting scene where she beat up the man on the bus! It was a good scene, where we see a Bangladeshi woman standing up against sexual harassment on public transport. More power to women!

How did you choose your cast? And how long did the film take to be made?

One fun fact about the film is that we actually re-shot the entire film with Masum Bashar, who I cast overnight, after scheduling issues with the previous actor. Masum bhai had no idea what was happening and still he believed in me. Aanon is a friend of my wife's and as I have known her for a while, I just knew she would do the role perfectly. *Pidim Theater* is where I discovered Hridoy, who had also shot an ad for Amitabh bhai before. We fattened him up for two weeks, gave him a funky haircut and called him Riddler throughout shoot.

How many awards did the film get?

Well quite a lot, but for me, I am just glad and honored to be in festivals like *NYIFF*, *Bahamas* and *Oscar* qualifying festivals like *Short Shorts Asia*.

Could share your journey as director and why did you choose this profession?

My journey as a director has been tough and the most gratifying experience ever, and for me, cinema fills my spiritual void. I am passionate about playing music and I love photography and film direction has everything that I love packaged into one.

What qualities do you think the young pursuing directors should have?

As advice to individuals considering a career in film-making, I would say that always be honest, authentic, and sincere about your intentions and your work. I feel there are many real stories in Bangladesh which are yet to be explored.

Any upcoming projects audience should forward to?

So many wonderful projects are on the way and I have made each project with all my heart and soul.

Any special message for the readers?

Listen to more music, watch more cinema, read more books, and get out of your bubble and do things you love because love is what makes the world a better place. Be mindful and compassionate and remember, it's ok to be eccentric. I am one at times, but all the work I do is for you and remember, even in your darkest times, the light at the end of the tunnel could be you.

By Joana Nomrata Mazumder

