

The story of jazz in Bangladesh

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While there is a constant growth within the cultural sector, the jazz scene in specific is currently experiencing a rapid growth of its audience base within the cities as well internationally. Since its inception this new sector hasn't experienced any dull events, and mostly had faced success in all its events. Let's look back at how the scene has developed from scratch and where it's going.

Up until 2013, there were very few "jazz" shows in Dhaka, maybe one or two annually at most. At the same time, a bunch of musicians who were quite passionate about learning music were seriously looking into being jazz musicians themselves. Despite the fact that there wasn't any platform that would cater to the specific genre, the musicians kept practicing within the small circuit and finally organised "International Jazz Day" on April 30, 2014 at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

The performers included Arjo Shrestho, Towfiq Arifin, Rahin Haider, Mohaimin Karim and yours truly. The event and consequently the jazz circuit shortly gained more recognition and big event management companies like Blues Communication recognised the jazz circuit. Soon after, they organised a festival with heavy hitters of the international jazz scene like fusion powerhouse John McLaughlin and Shai Maestro among others. We opened the festival with my quintet for John McLaughlin. Sadly though, the festival didn't continue after 2016. But still, there are many smaller shows in the scene now.

Building the scene from scratch here in Dhaka was not an easy task. We made a lot of mistakes and we hope to eventually become experts one day. It's a big learning curve. But honestly, we all really enjoyed the process and got to learn so much about the industry as well the business side that grows the scene. Over the years, we have seen some positive changes, for instance, most of our shows get sold out and there is a loyal audience

base that shows up at each and every gig. And because of that, it's easier to get sponsors for these shows than how it used to be.

To grow the scene further, we need more people actively participating in both the playing and organising part. I am very optimistic about the big change we are going to see in a few years. What I'm really proud of are my students. Some of them are doing really well and they're already playing gigs with me as well as opening my shows. Few persons and entities I'd like to thank for their wholehearted support towards the jazz scene are EMK Center, Gears For Ears, Zeenat Chowdhury of Bengal Foundation, Farhan Quddus of SecureX, Ehsanul Huq Tito of Radio ABC, Rantages and Nazia Tariq.

We're even getting to represent Bangladesh in the global scene at jazz festivals. We did a government-funded tour as Imran Ahmed Trio in Malaysia and Germany in May 2018. The response was massive in those countries. And now, we are set to tour Europe every year with some Asian countries in the list as well!

The scene, still quite small, has around 15 musicians who are doing shows every week whether in corporate events or at local venues. The musicians are in constant demand. Recently they have started inviting renowned folk musicians to collaborate with which was well-received from a house-full audience at North Club at a show organised by Planet X and Verve Bangladesh.

We can expect to see jazz shows more often, and soon enough, we'll start bringing in more international jazz artists to collaborate with the local musicians as well as conduct master classes and workshops. Planet X, Verve Bangladesh, and Jazz in Bangladesh plan to host and organise both medium and large scale jazz events throughout the country in the coming years.

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ROMANTICISM AND GOTHICISM THROUGH LITERATURE AND ARTS

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On April 18-19, 2019, Department of English and Humanities of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) hosted the fifth instalment of "Inter-University Student Conference and Cultural Competition" at their permanent campus in Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

This year's theme, "Romantic Miraculous Year", celebrated the 200th year of "Spring Odes" by British poet John Keats, "Ode to the West Wind" by P.B. Shelley and the first canto of "Don Juan" by Lord Byron. Students from 15 universities took part in the event by conducting extensive research on the given theme to present their ideas before an independent panel of judges.

The conference was divided into two parts: academic session and cultural competition. The first day of the event welcomed 29 students to present their academic papers to a panel of judges and audience members. The contestants were judged by Dr. Chidananda Bhattacharya, Professor and Head of Department of English, Rabindra Bharati University; and Prof. Abdus Selim, Chairperson of Department of Language-Literature, Central Women's University.

The winner of this section was Shamael Mortuza from ULAB for her paper titled "The Fault in Coleridge's Stars: A Contrapuntal Reading," while the runner-up was Mairuna Farhin from BRAC University for her paper "The Darkling: A Depiction of the Byronic Hero as an Anti-Villain."

The second day of the event included the cultural competition, where students from five different universities presented their interpretations of Romanticism and Gothicism through poetry, acting, and other

methods of theatrics. The jury for this part of the competition included Dr. Chidananda Bhattacharya; Dr. Kirsten Hackenbroch, Director, Goethe-Institut Bangladesh; and Ziaul Karim, Head of Brand and Communication, Eastern Bank Ltd.

Abdul Munim Khan Chowdhury, Shahneela Tazrin, Sheikh Tasmia Mirnmoi, Tasnim Hasan and Vincent Dip Gomez from ULAB took home the winning title for their performance titled "A Failed Student at Cambridge" based on the life of the Romantic poet S.T. Coleridge. Team from University of Asia Pacific (UAP) was announced the runner-up of the competition for their portrayal of "La Belle Dame sans Merci" — a drama narrative based on John Keats' poem of the same name.

The closing ceremony included Prof. Jahirul Haque, VC, ULAB; Prof. Imran Rahman, Special Adviser to the ULAB Board of Trustees. The vote of thanks was given by Prof. Shamsad Mortuza, Pro-VC, and Head of Department of English and Humanities, ULAB.

When asked about the purpose of the event, Conference Coordinator Sohana Manzoor PhD said, "Through this competition we want to create a platform for young scholars. This year we focused on exploring literature but throughout the years we've tried to focus on language and have open discussions on various topics."

The winner of the academic session received cash prize of BDT 10,000, while the runner-up received BDT 8,000. The cultural competition winner received a prize of BDT 15,000 and the runner-up team received BDT 10,000. All the winning participants and runner-ups were given crests, medals and certificates for their work.

