

LS PICK

Open Mics - The Echoes of the Unheard



The most undeniably potent antidote to the human condition is art, the singular expression to counteract venomous mundanities with all that is wonderful. In Dhaka, we carve out our space to exist somewhere in between the voices which go, "There is nothing to do here but eat," in endless circles and the conversations revolving around the finer life of some city in Europe.

While the avenues for consumption or showcasing one's creation are limited in a way, the rise in the number of open mics is indicative of a rebellion to upend the status quo.

Open mics attract acoustic musicians, poets, rappers, and comedians, and it can be a very eclectic mix — at least on paper. In reality, they are a box of Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans, and like Dumbledore,

you can be very unlucky with your pick and have a terrible evening out; maybe even earwax bad.

THE WHERE

The Junction, at Niketon, Banani's Jatra Biroti, and 3rd Space at Dhanmondi, are prominent spaces which host open mics frequently. If you are planning to slide into your performer-self's shoes, while calming your nerves, and bracing yourself to set foot on stage, you may choose to keep a lookout for the next event from one of these venues.

The trouble with the more mainstream outlets however, is that they are often missing electrifying acts, authentic words, and unfamiliar talent holding the audience's breath on the edge of a bent guitar string. The bleak reality is that the well-known venues usually end up with a room full of people just waiting for their own performance, while paying little attention to anyone else.

Jatra is currently charging Tk 100 for entrance, with free entry for performers. Their policy reads — "bring your own instrument, or you can just go solo." Yikes.

3rd Space hosts an open mic every month, since August last year, and does not charge anything for their open mics, due to their intention to create a platform for upcoming artists. The owner of 3rd Space, Muttaki Mahmud says, "Our biggest achievement has been the community we have built." He further adds, "It's been very positive. Everyone is enjoying the space, with no strings attached. We would love to see this grow."

WHICH ONES TO PARTICULARLY GO FOR

Hybrid shows which feature an act or a set line-up with an open mic segment are much more likely to leave the audience feeling like they have been a part of something extraordinary.

For the wordsmiths, alchemists of pages, and those interested in the craft of spinning verses into magic, two groups to watch out for are Litmosphere and The Verse mongers. Both groups occasionally dedicate segments of shows for participants from the audience.

The Verse mongers held an open flash poetry session at their last show, where those willing to perform came up with poems using words from fellow members of the audience.

UPCOMING SCENE FOR ARTISTS AND ART CONNOISSEURS

With the comedy scene on the rise, Naveed's Comedy Club hosts open mics for up and coming comedians, and even recruits talented potentials. Ampersand holds Spaceslam, which is usually an annual poetry slam, but with a few extra slots for those who would rather share their work without competing in the slam.

As George R.R. Martin has embedded into our hearts — winter is coming, and as the temperature is set to fall, the number of events will go up, as they do every year. Even if we don't have the likes of the Allen Ginsberg approved Nuyorican Poets Café in New York or live music clubs like The 100 Club in London, we are in possession of an indomitable spirit to create.

It is true that while open mic platforms do offer resistance, they are short-lived skirmishes, doomed to fail in a city with a dying art scene. To win the war, we must change the scene to accommodate artists who seek to pursue their passion above all else, in place of the current "bhai, chacha, mama" network driven scene. The strength of what art left dormant in the souls of so many can do is yet to be seen in Dhaka, open mics are but our glimpses.

By Naim Uddin
Photo: Collected

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