

A WALK DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

Rafiqul Alam reminisces old times

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Known for his playback and *adhunik* songs, celebrated musician and Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra artiste Rafiqul Alam has been a powerful presence in the Bangladeshi music industry for decades. Recently, on a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the artiste looks back at his memorable experiences.

"My first performance on radio was in Rajshahi. I sang the Rabindra Sangeet, *Jay Niye Jay, Amay Niye Jay*," shares Rafiqul Alam. "Back then, some of my friends in West Bengal praised my performance."

Alam's journey with radio is an integral part of his career. His song, *Tomake Jeno Bhule Na Jai*, garnered him immense popularity, while *Sojoni Nishi Pohailo* was the first song he recorded for BTV.

Joining Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was undoubtedly a turning point in the singer's life. "I am honoured to contribute to the independence of Bangladesh," says Alam. Back then, he produced five different songs at Shadhin Bangla Betar, and sang one of them as well. The experiences of meeting with several renowned artistes, including Zahir Raihan, shaped the singer's values in life.

His journey in playback singing began with the song, *Ektu Jodi Aj Neshai Holo* in the Satya Saha film, *Otthi*, featuring Razzak.

"Razzak was a superstar back then. During the rehearsal, the number of cameras and musicians as well as the cast and crew, made me very nervous," Alam shares.

After the recording, everyone came up to Alam and congratulated him on the successful rehearsal. "Satya Saha, Razzak and Mohammad Ali Siddiqui lauded my work that day," he says.

After the hit song *Boishakhi Megher Kache* came out, Alam never looked back. Director Dilip Shome recorded this song for his film *Smriti Tumi Bedona. Ek Hridoyhinar Kache Hridoyer Daam Ki Ache* is arguably his most popular song till date.

"I remember getting hundreds of heartfelt letters from fans when I worked at Bangla Academy," says the singer. Alam, along with poets Rafiq Azad, Nirmalendu Goon and many others used to gather around in the book shops of New Market for chats.

"My first overseas performance was in Bangkok, in a programme arranged by Bangladesh Biman. Abida Sultana and I performed a Thai song together, and our performance was well-received," reminisces Alam. "Such experiences have truly enriched my life."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Audiences at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

The deserted performing spaces

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

While artistes are exploring different digital platforms as makeshift performing spaces, the once crowded physical venues and auditoriums now remain deserted, amid the coronavirus crisis. As cultural events and gatherings were suspended across the country, rehearsals and scheduled programmes at several venues came to an abrupt halt.

All five auditoriums of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) have been shut since March 26. Fazle Rabbi Shukorno, Stage Manager of National Art Gallery Auditorium, BSA, elaborated on the circumstances. "From time to time, some of us come to the venue to check up on things. We have strict orders of keeping everything closed until further notice," he explains. According to him, no rigorous form of maintenance is required at

the moment. Their auditoriums and halls are expected to restart operations, once things get back on track. However, with no clear instructions from the authorities about reopening, waiting is the only option for the BSA team.

Bangladesh Mahila Samity (BMS), another hub of cultural and theatrical activities, is facing similar consequences. "Some of our staff members come here on alternate days for maintenance purposes," explains Gazi Ibrahim Firoz, Management Officer of BMS. "We usually turn on the air conditioner of the auditorium to keep it well ventilated and clean the premises, if necessary." According to him, even keeping up such nominal procedures is challenging with limited resources and at this point, their team is just praying for better days to arrive. Other venues such as Bangladesh National Museum,

National Public Library and Natmandal at Dhaka University also remain empty, with no substitute plans.

Widespread cancellations of events and performances have led to challenges for artistes and patrons alike. Through online talk sessions and personal posts on social media, several noted artistes have expressed their concerns about these performing spaces. Recently, theatre director and activist Bakar Bakul raised queries on social media, suggesting that these empty venues can be turned into makeshift isolation spaces or quarantine units with health and food facilities for the increasing number of COVID-19 patients in the country. As a return to normalcy for these venues remain uncertain at the moment, repurposing them in this way could prove to be helpful, in response to the global emergency.

Latest web shows to binge-watch

With no new movie releases and many large events cancelled or postponed, the entertainment industry is dominated by streaming services. Prominent platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hoichoi and Binge still have numerous new releases to offer. Let's dive into some latest and popular shows available on these platforms, that you must try out.

SHABARA IQBAL

Binge, an online platform for entertainment, was recently launched in Bangladesh with plenty of local and international content, including films and web shows. Celebrated director Shihab Shaheen's six-episode crime-thriller, *August 14*, is currently streaming on the platform. The series, based on true events, is about a young girl who murders her parents in cold blood. Tasnuva Tisha gives a commendable performance in the lead role.

Byomkesh Bakshi, the fictional Indian detective or 'truth-seeker' as he calls himself, was created by Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay, and has charmed readers since 1931. If you have grown up reading those stories, you must give Hoichoi's *Byomkesh*, starring Anirban Bhattacharya in the titular role, a watch. The latest and fifth season of the series started streaming

on the platform from January this year.

On the other hand, Netflix's *Hollywood* showcases a post-World War II film fraternity, where an ambitious group of aspiring actors and filmmakers will do almost anything to make their showbiz dreams come true. Created by Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan, the mini-series stars David Corenswet, Darren Criss and Patti LuPone, among others.

Moreover, the riveting Indian web series, *Paatal Lok*, starring Jaideep Ahlawat, is about a down and out cop who lands the case of a lifetime when four suspects are nabbed in the assassination of a prominent journalist. The pursuit of the case leads him to the dark netherworld, and to shocking discoveries in the past of the four suspects. The series, currently streaming on Amazon Prime, is directed by Avinash Arun and Prosit Roy.

We hope that these shows are a good treat for you, in these turbulent times.



Paatal Lok



Byomkesh



Hollywood



August 14



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

"These critical times have opened up new avenues for storytellers" -Ashfaque Nipun

SHARMIN JOYA

Celebrated director and screenwriter Ashfaque Nipun is known for dealing with contemporary and political issues in his stories. Last year, two of his tele-fictions, *Ei Shohore* and *Agontuk*, were quite well-received by viewers. This year, his tele-fiction, *Mukh O Mukhoshor Golpo*, was released on Valentine's Day. It depicts the complications in the relationship of a modern couple beautifully. In a recent conversation with *The Daily Star*, Nipun talks about the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the field of television and the probable changes in storytelling techniques in a post-coronavirus world.

As most television shows are produced bearing big festivals such as Eid in mind, the months around them are usually the busiest and most lucrative season for the television sector. However, concerns over the rapidly spreading coronavirus turned out to be a major obstacle for the fraternity, this year, as TV shoots are halted.

To start things off, Nipun spoke about the stories that he wants to make after this ordeal ends. "Well, I have a few ideas in mind, but I don't want to give out any spoilers," he says. "For now, all I can say is that the audiences will be able to relate to the content."

According to him, storytelling techniques and representations of stories will change after the pandemic is over. "These critical times have opened up new avenues for storytellers," Nipun explains. "I believe that the predicaments, connections, systematic failures, responsibilities and mostly, the

realisations we have all had will play into fictional stories as powerful elements. However, as a community, we are going to struggle to get back up on our own feet, once we begin working again."

Although television has been introduced to new and experimental creative techniques, Nipun noted that storytelling has become monotonous and repetitive, with intangible censorship being one of the biggest struggles for directors and screenwriters. "We can only show twenty percent of the story that we truly want to tell, especially when we are working with contemporary or sensitive issues that are connected to political matters," shares Nipun. "We have to leave the remaining eighty percent to the viewers' interpretations. This is a major drawback in exploring any form of art, for us."

While past shows such as *Kothao Keu Nei*, *Bohubrihi* and *Shongshoptok* were successful in striking a chord with the public, many find it difficult to connect with the stories on television today. "The lack of creativity and variety in the stories, along with the tendency to follow certain trends, rather than setting new ones, have resulted in a failure to connect with the audience," asserts Nipun. "You see, at present, two types of projects are being produced – one is based on the audiences' choices and the other creates its own audience. For the past five years, I have been trying to build a group of viewers who are interested in watching socio-political stories. My observation is that only a few directors have gradually succeeded in exploring that genre."