



Aly Zaker in 'Galileo'.

PHOTO: STAR

Remembering my Galileo

ABDUS SELIM

Aly Zaker, my Galileo, made his final exit in the early hours of November 27, 2020, bringing about a nationwide realisation of loss and shock. Yet, my poignant torment stems from an exclusivity—an affliction of my own—because this titanic man—both physically and qualitatively—enthused me immensely to be associated with theatre. The play that I translated almost half a century back in 1975, was initially a result of my mere leisure garden pleasure, for when I had translated “Life of Galileo Galilei”, I never thought that it will be performed on the stage ever.

I wrote in my introduction of the publication of the play in 1977 that the rendition was much more intended for readers of Bertolt Brecht than for the stage. It was because until then, I had no practical knowledge of writing or translating any drama-dialogue suitable for performers. Aly Zaker came to my rescue.

He showed me how a person of Galileo's stature, a freak of a scientist, could be resurrected and justified as a person in flesh and blood on the stage. I could visualise Galileo in a way that I had never envisioned him during my process of translating the play. Aly Zaker, in fact, made me realise my potential in drama translation and I have worked through 30 plays till date. He made Galileo ‘real’ to me, with his larger than life presence.

I could see the indomitably intelligent man and the starwarrior who loved food and old wine in Aly Zaker himself—my very own Galileo. He took me by hand into the world of performing art, and my entire practice of literary writing from then on was impacted by his unparalleled acting. In 2017, I visited the Zakers at their Banani residence several times.

Interestingly, Aly Zaker had proposed to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs that I should be awarded with the Ekushey

Padak in 2017, but somehow it did not work out. I still feel honoured that the suggestion came from him, which is no less than getting the award itself. Once, I read out one of my latest translations, “PremPotro”, in the presence of Ferdousi Majumdar, Ramendu Majumdar and Tropa Majumdar at his residence.

Ramendu Majumdar actually wanted Aly Zaker and Ferdousi Majumdar to portray the two named roles of the play, which was supposed to be directed by Tropa Majumdar. After the reading, Aly Zaker expressed his keenness to act in the play, but that could not happen because of his prolonged fight with cancer.

I made a promise on my own accord to dedicate one of my next publications to him, and with that in mind, I hastily proofread, “PanchMonchanubad” to be published by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. To my disappointment, I failed to do that during his lifetime. It is rightly said that wishes of mortals do not commensurate with those of the Almighty.

I tested positive for the coronavirus during the months of May and June and lost one-on-one contact with Aly Zaker. But we communicated through ‘likes’ and clicks on social media, until he fell severely ill.

In remembering him, I would say: *Aly Zaker, I am sure that when you meet Galileo on the other side and measure up your respective achievements, you will find clear similarities between yourself and him. He was rigid to the establishment of scientific truths and brought about a new world for the future generations—for the rich and poor alike—fighting against prejudices and religious fundamentalism just like you. You walked the path of practicing liberal culture and aesthetics.*

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Farewell to the Renaissance Man

Aly Zaker remembered by Monchosarothi Ataur Rahman

Aly Zaker, known in his intimate circle as “Chhotlu” left us for eternity on November 27, 2020. He was 76.

As a passionate theatre practitioner for the last 48 years, I had the good fortune to be very close to him. He started theatre immediately after the Liberation War of Bangladesh, and joined Nagorik Natya Sampradaya in 1972.

The man made history in theatre for his extraordinary portrayal of the lead role in “Dewan Gazir Kissa”. His character, Dewan Gazi, became a household name in those days. The story was adapted by Asaduzzaman Noor from the comedy, “Mr Puntila and his Man Matti”, written by famed German playwright Bertolt Brecht. “Dewan Gazir Kissa” had over 371 performances, making its premiere in 1977.

Aly Zaker acted in a major role in Michel Madhusudhan Datta's renowned story, “Buro Shaliker Garae Ro”, which was performed in the then WAPDA audition. The performance ran for three nights. In the earlier days of Bengal, plays of different content and texture used to be played for two to three nights by different small and big organisations.

The plays used to be enacted during different socio-cultural occasions. The Zamindars (landlords) in those days used



Aly Zaker

to sponsor stages for theatre and cultural performances in their premises. Besides, different educational institutions used to present yearly dramas for two to three nights. Office clubs and different neighbourhoods used to have theatrical performances for entertainment and social mingling.

Aly Zaker came up with the idea of running a theatre performance in the evening in exchange of selling tickets at that time, and it was a huge success. It ran on the basis of the spectators' demands for the play, much like a movie.

When he directed Badal Sarker's “Baki Itihash” it ran for eight performances at the British Council Auditorium in exchange of tickets of BDT 5 and BDT 10. Nagorik Natya Sampradaya had to eventually move to Mahila Samity of New Baily Road (now Natok Sarani), which was in a dilapidated condition in those days. With the efforts of all other theatre groups, namely Theatre, Dhaka Theatre, Dhaka Padatik, Aranyak among



Aly Zaker and Ataur Rahman in ‘Dewan Gazir Kissa’, directed by Asaduzzaman Noor (1977).

others, the auditorium became a staple of theatre. Thus, Aly Zaker broke the barrier of limited theatre performances of the bygone days in conjunction with his co-workers. “Baki Itihash” was a difficult and existentialist play, but it was successful which got audience acceptance due to Aly Zaker's extraordinary gift as a theatre director.

Aly Zaker was a well-read person with appreciable knowledge in both English and Bengali literature. He was capable of writing and reading both the languages at ease. His vocabulary and writing capacity were impeccable.

In contrast to age-old ideas relating to theatre, he rose to great heights as a director and actor. He aptly directed the play “Sat Manusher Khonje” an adaptation of “Good Person of Setzaun” by Bertolt Brecht. It ran for a staggering 55 performances. Aly Zaker's acting in “Shahjahan” by D L Roy was highly appreciable. Although Aly Zaker physically very much contrasted the frail and heartbroken Moghul Emperor Shahjahan, he covered that up with his acting talent.

Aly Zaker, over time, turned out to be one of the most talented actor-directors in his era. He created history in the role of Galileo Galilei. German playwright Bertolt Brecht's play was translated by Professor Abdus Selim and directed by myself. The late Syed Shamsul Haq, our great poet-playwright in his regular column titled *Hrith Kolomer Tane*, had written in the daily *Sambad* that the director had done a great job by setting the play in the small auditorium of German Cultural Institute in Dhanmondi Road 2.

His extraordinary performance in “Nurul Diner Sarajibon”, which he directed himself, will also be remembered forever. The play was written by Syed Shamsul Haq.

Aly Zaker very aptly adapted and directed Shakespeare's “Hamlet” as “Darpon”, which received the audience's profound acceptance. He will also be remembered for his superb

acting in Shakespeare's “Macbeth” in the lead role. Directed by Christopher Sanford, the play was sponsored by the British Council of Dhaka. He was equally good as a performer in the lead role as Prospero in Shakespeare's play “The Tempest”, directed by Debora Warner from England. Both the plays were sponsored by the British Council, and were performed by the local theatre practitioners of different theatre groups of Dhaka.

Aly Zaker created a new wave amongst the audience of Dhaka, when he directed and adapted German playwright Carl Zuckmayer's play “The Captain of Köpenick”. The play was performed in the ‘theatre in the round’ style within the Mahila Samity auditorium. Eminent actor and reciter Asaduzzaman Noor acted in the lead role. Aly Zaker innovated a new style -- the actors used to change their costumes in front of the audience while the play was going on. Each of us had to depict more than one character of the play.

He was successful in every aspect of his life. He was a responsible family man. He was fun-loving and a great storyteller. His residence was a great place for rendezvous of friends of varied areas of knowledge and interests. Aly Zaker used to love kids very much, and carried the innocence of a child in his heart.

Although he was a well-travelled person, he loved Bangladesh the most. Our flora and fauna, sky, rivers and people appeared to him. He was a courageous freedom fighter during the Liberation War, and he was an English newscaster in Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

The great man fought cancer for the last four years of his life, like a hero. He has left us all in a void, but the countrymen will remember him for all the time to come as a ‘renaissance’ man. We all will miss him forever. Au revoir, my friend!

The writer is an eminent actor, writer, director, and a recipient of the Ekushey Padak.



(L) Pori Moni as Olivia in the film on Pritilata, directed by Rashid Palash. (R) Bappy Chowdhury with director Ashraf Shishir on the sets of ‘570’.



Cameras roll for new films across the country

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the release of new films has been on hold for quite some time. However, shooting of numerous upcoming films kicked off in full swing. Logistics for production shoots are complicated to begin with, and if one adds the extra layer of safety protocols that has to be figured out, some things will inevitably fall through the cracks. Nonetheless, our film fraternity deserves a lot of credit for adapting to the unprecedented circumstances quickly.

The cast and crew of the Raihan Rafi directorial “Damal”, featuring Bidya Sinha Mim and Siam Ahmed among others, began shooting recently. The film focuses on the journey of the Shadhin Bangla Football Team.

The team of “Bhalobasha Pritilata”, based on a novel by Selina Hossain, recently filmed at Dhaka Central Jail. The film, directed by Pradip Ghose, features Nusrat Imrose Tisha in the role of revolutionary Pritilata Waddedar.



Apu Biswas and Nirab in ‘Chayabrikkho’.

Another film on the life of Pritilata Waddedar, directed by Rashid Palash, also went on the floors recently. However, the lead actor, Pori Moni, was injured during a fight scene. Subsequently, the shooting was temporarily halted by the director.

“Ei Tumi Shei Tumi”, directed by renowned actor Kabori, will see debuts Riyad Rayhan and Nishat Nawar Salwa in the lead roles. Sabina Yasmin will also make her debut as a composer and music director with this film.

The cast and crew of “1971 Shei Shob Din”, directed by Hridi Huq, shot at a location in Old Dhaka. The film features Pori Moni and Moushumi Hamid in major roles.

Dighi, who has worked as a child artiste before, is set to play the lead role in the film, “Tungipara Mia Bhai”, opposite Shanto Khan. Directed by Shamim Ahamed Roni, the film was shot at BFDC and several other locations.

Directed by Saidul Islam Rana, “Biroto”, featuring Emon in the lead role, recently concluded shooting at Rajbari's Doulodiya Jouno Polliand Goolondo Ghat upazila.

Apu Biswas and Nirab's upcoming film, “Chayabrikkho”, directed by Bandhon Biswas, was recently shot at Chattogram's Rangunia. This film is funded by the government.

Directed by Ashraf Shishir, the upcoming film, “570”, features Bappy Chowdhury in a major role. The film will highlight the immediate aftermath of the brutal incidents of August 15, 1975.

National Film Award-winning actor Popy will be starring in the Impress Telefilm production, “Bhalobasha Projapoti”, jointly directed by Masuma Tani and Raju Alim. Popy shared that she has finished shooting some portions of the film.

Translated by Rasheek Tabassum Mondira

Ridy on a roll

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Russian born Bangladeshi dancer, choreographer, model and actor Ridy Sheikh first earned the spotlight for her participation in international dance shows like “So You Think You Can Dance” and “Dance Plus”. She also actively engages with her fans over social media and with over 800,000 subscribers on her official YouTube channel. Currently, the artiste resides in Bangladesh, exploring her roots and hoping to build a career based on her creative passion. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, Ridy Sheikh shares her current project, future plans and more!

How has the coronavirus pandemic affected you?

During the pandemic, I had to follow a very strict routine as my parents were very particular regarding social distancing. I just did one shoot in July and then stayed in home quarantine for the next two weeks. Being in this line of work, we have to opt towards different ways of maintaining social distancing as we can't wear masks during shots, and also have to work in collaboration with teams while shooting. Thus, I only managed to take this chance once and then went back to living in isolation until September.

How did you adapt to the 'new normal'?

During the pandemic,

I started recording my dance covers at home with my mother as my cinematographer. I was shocked and amazed to see her skills and the way she took those videos. Other than that, I also wanted to keep my fans driven and thus, started releasing motivational videos to keep them entertained and inspired during such tough times.

What is your inspiration behind choosing this career?

I am a student of Economics and despite having a very serious academic background, I chose to follow my creative passion – music and dance. I am a very confident and dedicated individual by nature and I believe, hard work begets success. Also, I enjoy inspiring people and people inspire me to go ahead with my initiatives, and for me, that is my strongest driving force.

What are you currently busy with?

I recently collaborated with Nusraat Faria and we shot a dance cover for her track, “Ami Chai Thakte”. The video is available on my YouTube channel. Currently, I am exploring

K-pop music and related dance-forms alongside my usual practices. I am also doing a catchy dance number, featuring

Shakib Khan for his upcoming film “Nabab LLB”.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

