

Dreams of Dameer

In conversation with a young, rising musician

EAHSAN ABEDIN

Upon hearing the words, “*Hariye jeyo na, amar jaan, amar jaan*,” I jumped out of my bed to look at the artist, only to fall in love with the music and listen to it on loop for hours to come. It was Dameer.

Dameer Khan, 20, is a singer-songwriter, producer and most importantly, a dreamer and an aspiring changemaker. By combining Western indie rock/pop and jazz with Bengali influences, pairing lo-fi tunes with psychedelic riffs, the exception in Dameer’s music is easily noticeable. Lyrics containing odes to positive romanticism, heartbreak and politics, and even mental health, will make you feel as if the words have been taken right out of your mouth and have been perfectly structured in three-to-four minute idiosyncrasies.

Dameer’s lyrics are the kind that will carry you to another realm at 4 in the morning, where you will laugh and cry, and if it’s raining, you will look outside your window in a different perspective.

With beginnings in Dhaka, finding new inspiration and vibrance in Kuala Lumpur in his mid-teens to recording at Red Bull Studios in Berlin, Dameer offers extraordinary music. SHOUT sat with Dameer for a cup of coffee and conversation over Zoom, and talked over his thoughts on music, life and Bangladesh.

Dameer grew up around music; his father, Pilu Khan, is part of the legendary music band *Renaissance*. Although his father never forced music onto him, musicians like Bappa Mazumder and Partha Barua regularly visiting the house had a positive impact. Picking up the guitar at a relatively early age, Dameer always went the extra step, simply because he loved doing it. He fell in love seeing his cousin using FL Studio and, with YouTube as his teacher, Dameer started learning and producing genres like hip-hop, EDM and indie.

By 16, Dameer had started sending out his music to different labels. After two consecutive years of dedication, making demos, producing and constant rejection, Majestic Records responded one day. Dameer says, “People are listening, everybody is looking for the next big thing. Send your demos out. Go to the internet, do a bit of homework and you can do it.”

From growing up in Dhaka and hanging out with friends at Star Kabab after exams, to moving to Malaysia, Dameer grew both as an individual and as an artist. But he still believes he has unfinished work in his hometown. He misses Dhaka and the city’s charm. He misses the sound of the flute player

all night beside Pizza Hut in Gulshan. He reminisced about how he misses playing cricket on the rooftop, how much he liked the roadside *fuchka* and how that will always be a part of him. Although he’s set to settle in Canada soon, Dameer can’t get over the beauty that Bangladesh has to offer.

“If we, as young people, as artists, are not trying to find something that makes Bangladesh beautiful, we are going to step into an artistic quagmire, a cultural quicksand that we will never get out of. This should be the start of a new movement re-aligning the public image of Bangladesh, because we can do so much more,” he shares.

Coming back to music, Dameer has new things coming out. He will be releasing one final song in his current album *For We Are Distant*. He also has plans to release Bangla music, and in his words, do it justice.

Talking about the backstory of his popular track “*Amar Jaan*”, he says that the song was written about a long distance relationship when he left the country. That relationship was the only source of mental peace to him amidst the cultural shock and new environment he was then in. This song was written quite a while after the end of the relationship which took a lot of love and effort but turned sour. Dameer mentions, in retrospect, the relationship was very special to him and that’s why the song resonated with many listeners.

The music video of the song – when contemplating what this song meant to him – Dameer

thought it felt like marriage. Dameer converted a 180-minute VHS tape of his parents’ wedding into digital and settled on this cheesy, corny, 90s Bangladeshi wedding footage, realising instantly this was what he was looking for. This music video felt like a good shift, after his two previous music videos being professionally produced.

Although Dameer is aware that the chances of succeeding as a musician is terrifyingly low, he tells himself that it’s not always about succeeding, but more about loving and exploring the music. Music was always his form of escapism and he is proud of being able to curate his job around it.

He also didn’t think he would make it this far. In the future, Dameer wants to expand his art and be something Bangladesh has never seen before. With the experience and knowledge that he is gaining abroad, he wants to help and build new artists in Bangladesh and possibly open up his own record label company one day. He wants to fix the problems he sees in the Bangladeshi music industry and push it in an interesting, ground-breaking, paradigm-shifting way. He wants to embody the change he wants to see and create progressive, innovative music.

Dameer’s final message is very clear: If we don’t turn this ship around, we are looking forward to a very bleak future. He is, of course, talking about the need for a major change in the current Bangladeshi music scene, from introducing entertainment lawyers, better labels and more organised deals, to building up a new music environment which will include better trap, EDM, dance and other genres.

To him, “The artist has lost all credibility in Bangladesh and we need to put out a message.” Dameer is anxious, but at the same time, very hopeful for the future, saying, “We have been juggling through trauma for too long and we are slowly finding an outlet for it and that’s why new artists are growing. Let’s not build the Bangladesh we want, but the Bangladesh we deserve.”



PHOTO: GEORGE CHONG



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

THE BIOPIC OF A BANGLADESHI BAND

AAQIB HASIB

The summer of 2008. That was the year Bangladeshi underground music scene was at its peak. Jam pads were booked 24/7 and there was never a weekend where the hallowed halls of Russian Cultural Centre (RCC) in Dhanmondi were empty.

2008 was also the year my friends and I started our own band. This is our story.

May 23, 2008

The summer of 2008 started like any other summer would for the backstory of a soon-to-be obscure musician — with a heartbreak. My girlfriend had just broken up with me and it was taking quite a toll on me. In a desperate attempt to distract myself, I decided to meet my best friend, Jahangir Kallol at Dhanmondi Lake.

“Yo, Mishu. What’s up, man?” Jahangir greeted me, as we shoulder bumped each other. “I heard Maria turned you down and humiliated you in front of everyone. How’s that burn feeling?”

Typical Jahangir, he had shown up just to rub salt in my wounds.

“I feel great. Why would I care? She’s dating that loser Ateek now!” I replied, trying to sound nonchalant.

Ateek was the biggest loser from our school. He was tall, moderately good looking and played football. But none of that had attracted Maria before. It was only recently when he had shown up to the Pahela Baishakh Mela at school with a guitar and performed Artcell’s *Pothchola* five times on repeat that he really caught Maria’s eye.

“Pfft, I’m sure I could be so much better at the guitar than him. He barely knows the power chord.”

Thus, a journey began. Things were set in motion that day and there was no looking back.

June 2, 2008

Having learned five different chords and watched two YouTube tutorials at 240p, I felt that my journey as a musician needed a band around it to truly succeed. After all, I wasn’t just about to become a solo pop star. We all knew what happens to solo artists with deep voices.

With my mind now set on the idea, I called upon my closest friends to join the lineup of the next great rock band out of Dhaka. We called ourselves “Unconscious Subconscious”. US.

Shabbir: Classically trained in the tabla, we assumed that he’d naturally take to a drum set.

Tafsan: He wanted to play the guitar, but was forced to play the bass because I had already decided to be the guitarist.

Jahangir: Having sung the national anthem at a school festival once, who else would be the vocalist in US?

“But there’s a problem. We all know Jahangir isn’t a cool name,” said Tafsan, “We should give him a cool name if he is going to be the frontman.”

“How about Jango?” suggested Shabbir. “No, we need something more iconic,” I replied.

Jahangir looked up at us, smiling. It was as if he had waited his entire life for this moment because things would change forever. No one would ever call him Jahangir again.

“Joe. Call me Joe,” he said. The rest of us



looked at each other and nodded, slowly, in agreement.

The rest is history. Even now, 13 years later, people still call him Joe.

July 17, 2008

As I alluded to earlier, it was hard to find a jam pad free on the weekend, so it was only after around two sessions in our local jam pad, Excursion, that US was ready to make its debut on the stage.

Our first “gig” was scheduled to be at the upcoming “Battle of the Bands” and we had our hearts set on winning it.

On the night of, as we gathered at the show, everyone was ecstatic. Who else could win but us? Did anyone else have the same level of dedication as we had two sessions in a jam pad in beforehand? Our talent was undeniable.

That was before the show. What happened during the show changed our lives forever.

Having performed our cover of *Khaite Paro*, we awaited the judges comments.

They were stunned. Mortified by our

presence, I assumed. After a short break of them just looking at us with their jaws dropped to the floor, the reputed vocalist and keyboardist from *Cryptic Dementia* coughed hard, and said, “That was quite a performance. Unfortunately, we don’t think you’ll make it to the next round on the back of it but keep practising. I am sure you’ll get somewhere. Rock on.”

We were screwed by the system. A bunch of immensely talented musicians pushed out of a talent show for simply being too talented? It hurt, but there was no going back.

July 21, 2008

band before us to finish their set, Jawad Ahmed from *Enemy Lines* approached us.

“Hey, I heard you guys playing in Battle of the Bands,” said Jawad bhai, smiling. “I thought you guys were really good. It’s always good to see new kids on the block. Keep rocking.”

He walked away, having changed our lives in the process. We looked on, star-struck.

As we stepped on stage, it felt different this time. Previously, we had just let our cockiness kill the nerves, but this time we had the words of one of our idols to push us through.

We looked at each other, the widest grins across our faces before I slammed the D chord and opened US’s set with our very own *Pagla Batpar (1)*. ***

June 20, 2021

Life is a little weird. Looking back, it feels funny to know a bunch of kids with a few months of experience and a heart full of passion actually made it.

Unconscious Subconscious™ became a hit after our first performance at RCC. *Pagla Batpar (1)* and *Pagla Batpar III: BatparAshlo Firey* were two of our most commercially successful songs.

Our albums *Unconscious Subconscious* and *Greatest Hits of Unconscious Subconscious* both went platinum twice.

Joe went on to run for public office. He used *Pagla Batpar 2* as his campaign song and saw great success in the tri-state area.

Shabbir went on to become a doctor, but still plays as a session drummer for 37 different bands.

Tafsan left the band in 2010, to pursue his solo career. Initially there was a bit of beef between us, but as with all brothers, we eventually reunited in 2013 for our five year anniversary show. He proposed to his girlfriend on the stage. She said no.

As for me, I decided to start making music commercially. You may have heard my work in TV and Spotify ads for Khaka Ball Shaban and Gucci Mishti Chanachur.

We’re all in different fields and places now, but Unconscious Subconscious™ holds a special place in all our hearts. The community of musicians and fans kept us going through some of the hardest times. So, till Hoichoi picks up a documentary about our journey and our 13th anniversary (virtual) concert.

Our special thanks to Neo Mendes and Omni Music for the photoshoot. Find your music equipment, and more, at www.facebook.com/OmniMusic