

THE DEFINITIVE
YOUTH
MAGAZINE

SHOUT

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THE GENERATION THAT
NEVER SLEEPS, AND WHY

PG 3

PETS AREN'T SOCIAL MEDIA
ACCESSORIES

PG 4



THE CONSEQUENCES OF **COMPARISON**



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

EDITORIAL

Are things getting back to normal? Do I even dare entertain the thought?

I sat in familiar Farmgate traffic this week, the sort where after half an hour, or maybe seven, you start imagining miniscule movements of the vehicles ahead of you. It was familiar but also jarring, and if I didn't have work to get to I think I would have run away. Farmgate traffic is too real for the fantasy version of a life I've been living these last 18 months. I am not ready.

I wonder if anyone is ready, to be quite honest. We all want to be ready, everyone's desperate for things to be like what they used to be. But, we are also scared that things will get much worse if we rush it – a valid fear. Many of us have forgotten how terrible things were back when no one knew Wuhan was a thing, and getting back to normal will include remembering the coping mechanisms and lost habits that we used to survive life in this city (and in this reality in general) from day to day.

Who knows how long it'll take for them to come back?

– Azmin Azran, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

MOVIES



How is *Perfect Blue* Even More Relevant in 2021?

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

Satoshi Kon's 1997 film *Perfect Blue* never intended to predict anything at all. Yet, the unusual themes and storyline seem to be more relevant now than ever before.

Perfect Blue is the story of a singer called Mima Kirigoe as she shifts careers to become an actress, and the horrors that result from that attempt.

"I'm always looking at Mima's Room," someone says when Mima is surrounded by fans. This sets the movie in motion and summarises a central theme that is more relevant today than at the time of the movie's making. When Mima decides to undergo a significant change in her public image, she realises that her identity as a pop idol has become larger than who she is.

The audience is first introduced to Mima with contrasting shots of her performing at a concert and doing everyday activities. This makes the scary things that happen to Mima leave us shaken, feeling that it can happen to any of us.

And sadly, it can.

We all have our own highly curated social media image and at least a micro audience. The contrast between ourselves and the avatars we create often become disorienting. We may find ourselves painstakingly devoting our entire lives trying to conform to this fictional concept of ourselves we put on display online. The prevalence of influencer culture is a very real manifestation of the scope and scale of these dangers.


Mima's Room is a website run by a stalker who posts diary entries of Mima's everyday life from Mima's point of view, initially with unsettling detail and accuracy. Eventually, the entries no longer align with what Mima presently stands for as an actress. Here, someone else is indirectly telling Mima who they would like her to be, in contrast to who she currently chose to be. Mima is tormented and eventually starts losing grasp of her own identity. This thrusting of a persona more favoured by fans could be symbolic of the society telling us who we should be, or the obligation to conform to a more marketable identity.

Obsession with and rampant idolisation of celebrities is nothing new, but *Perfect Blue's* depiction of it over 20 years ago feels incredibly suggestive of present day climate. Mima's stalker's violent response to her no longer fitting his idea of her illustrates how, at present, the slightest slip up leads to the most dedicated fans losing all compassion and devoting themselves to cancelling their idols and their careers.


Uncanny predictions are far from the only thing exceptional about this film. The beautiful cinematography is aesthetic, bold enough to tell an impactful story, and subtle enough to be open to interpretation providing each viewer with a personal experience.

If you haven't seen it already, this article gives away nothing. *Perfect Blue* is one film you will not regret watching.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

ARE YOU DOING A MASTER'S FOR THE RIGHT REASONS?

AAQIB HASIB

In recent years, we hear of more and more people around us going abroad to undertake a masters' degree. While many will attribute this trend as an indicator for Bangladesh's development, the question is whether that's really the case?

While the accessibility to higher education, specifically higher education abroad, has definitely increased in the last couple of decades, there are still a few alternate reasons as to why the number of master holders from Bangladesh might be increasing.

JOB MARKET STANDARDS

Our job market is very archaic in its beliefs. I have seen openings for starting positions in organisations requiring a master's degree, for a minimum salary. Moreover, the job description will tell you that an undergraduate degree, let alone a master's degree, is definitely not required to execute the type of required tasks.

Having spoken to multiple HR experts over this issue, the reason seems to be the same in most cases. Using a master's degree to filter out potential candidates for the job is easier than conducting an in-depth evaluation test. As a result, some workplaces look for master's candidates even if the job does not require that level of knowledge.

A ROUTE OUT OF THE COUNTRY

We have all heard this: apply abroad for higher studies so you can "settle down" there. Many Bangladeshis believe that leaving the country is the smart thing to do, especially for future generations.

For many, life abroad is much better in comparison. We need to re-evaluate, as a country, whether educated people leaving the country is truly an indicator of long-term development. Are sufficient opportunities not available for these individuals

domestically, that they feel the need to emigrate?

MASTER'S OR MARRIAGE?

Many young women feel compelled to go for a master's degree right after their undergraduate degree, for fear of being forced into marriage. Our social and cultural issues have long put pressure on young women to be married by the time they are nearing the end of their studies.

The other side to this, is where women are not allowed to pursue a master's, specifically abroad, without being married first. These situations are unfair to the women in both scenarios and we need to re-evaluate our social norms to encourage women to freely choose what they want.

The consequences of an increasing number of master's degree holders can also be detrimental. If this becomes the standard requirement for entry-level jobs, the situation becomes unfair for those who do not have the luxury to afford a master's degree. At the same time, the value of these degrees will continue to fall, with employers seeing it as a minimum requirement, therefore salaries offered will be even lower. We should ideally ensure we are doing master's for the right reasons. Whether it's to become specialised in a certain field, or to branch out into different territories from your undergraduate studies, the degree can be extremely useful. That is exactly why we shouldn't just apply to one without considering what it adds to your individual academic and professional sides.

The Generation That Never Sleeps, and Why

ARYAH JAMIL

The early bird gets the worm. Work the longest hours and the hardest and you're bound to succeed. We've all heard these things from the generations preceding us, or at least seen posts about "grinding 25/8" on social media platforms.

While navigating the toxicity of hustle culture, pressures of late capitalism and the global shortcomings of implementing a true meritocracy, Gen Z just can't seem to sleep.

Averaging less than 7.5 hours of sleep, Gen Z is expected to perform at the highest levels with the least amount of energy. Millennials and Gen Z are just depressed, hypersensitive slobs who don't know the true meaning of hard work and waste their youth on their devices. Right?

Gen Z is perhaps the most affected by perfectionism and the pressures of productivity. Students are constantly struggling to push themselves into this idealised version of a "perfect teenager"; 8 hours at school, 8 hours for sleep and 8 hours of free time.

I, personally, go to an English medium school. Pre-pandemic, my day started at 6 AM for school, until 3:30 PM. Two hours of tuition, an hour of homework with an hour in frustrating Dhaka traffic. That's almost 14 hours of pure academics. Inadequacies of the education system dip into our free time.

Free time is an obsolete concept. For Gen Z, there is only time used and time wasted. They structure their lives around work, the only priority. Their youth is sacrificed for this notion of "a better future" that never seems to come. These stresses eat away at their meal and sleep. Worries of not doing enough, upcoming deadlines, the opportunity cost of resting is a constant source of stress and anxiety.

Our devices are an extension of our physical selves especially in a pandemic they're often our only connection to the outside world. The infinite scroll and hours on our Facebook feed take a toll on us. We consume so much more media on a daily basis. Compared to older generations, who had newspapers and TV for information, we have live minute-to-minute news. Logging off and digital detoxes are practically impossible. Global catastrophes, sexual violence, murder allegations are just things we consume every hour online. Even if it seems normal, on a subliminal level these stresses and worries seep into our minds. Blue light confuses the body with natural light and hampers the natural production of melatonin.

Some of us aren't built to wake up at 7 AM and work throughout the day, we'd much rather prefer putting in work at a later time in the day. People seem to assume early risers are higher achievers. We hear about CEOs waking up at 4 AM and internalise that as our only definition of success. Correlation isn't causation. Waking up early won't make you more successful and Gen Z is begging other generations to listen to them.

Aryah Jamil is mediocre at everything except laughing at her own jokes Tell her to stop talking at jamil.aryah@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



Pets Aren't Social Media Accessories

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

RASHA JAMEEL

The demand for Scottish Fold cats, a breed once popular in the 1970s, saw a resurgence in the breeding market after being extensively photographed in the arms of singers Taylor Swift and Ed Sheeran, as well as actors Kirsten Dunst and Patrick Dempsey.

There is also Maru, the famous Scottish fold cat from Japan, who is in the ranks of "internet's most popular cats" with videos that have raked in more than 300 million views in total. In the words of Gudrun Ravetz, president of the British Veterinary Association, the breed's popularity largely revolves around people finding the cats to be "cute" and thus, "instagrammable".

What people went on to disregard is the price these cats have to pay for that very cuteness.

The Scottish fold cat's most distinguishable physical feature is their tiny ears which appear to be folded over. As adorable as these floppy ears are, they're the result of a painful genetic mutation that causes the cats to possess deformed cartilage. Long-term side effects of having such deformed cartilages include leading a low-quality, painful life and developing incurable variants of arthritis.

Taking into account the severity of the genetic disorder, UK's Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF) permanently halted the registrations of Scottish folds in the 1970s. Despite the ban, the Scottish fold breed eventually found its way to the US, where it gained enough popularity to prompt breeders to open up shop once more.

The cruel usage of Scottish fold cats as props on social media isn't the only case of



animal cruelty that has been swept under the rug for the sake of internet fame. In the name of entertaining viral videos, irresponsible pet owners have often resorted to putting their pets in harm's way so as to boost their online presence.

In 2019, #puttinabun became a trending TikTok challenge which required pet owners to tie their pets' ears together with

tight hair bands. The shameless depiction of animal cruelty in this challenge posed major health risks to the helpless animals in question, all of whom were being abused to the point of their blood vessels getting ruptured.

In the most recently-documented case of animal abuse being sidelined on social media, TikTok user @mafishguy posted a video of himself tickling a stingray that'd been lifted from its aquatic habitat. The video went viral for the wrong reasons as the viewers mistook the stingray's state of distress for one of joy.

According to the programs director of World Animal Protection USA, Ben Williamson, the stingray in the video was "suffocating to death" as a result of being exposed to a non-aquatic environment where there's no water to draw oxygen from.

Internet personalities here in Dhaka too have often contributed to normalising the toxic practice of exporting exotic pets from abroad, namely Alaskan Malamutes, Huskies, and Maine Coons. The animal export business is highly unethical to say the least, as it's sole focus is centered on the maximisation of profits at the expense of the animals' safety and well-being.

When it comes to the aforementioned breeds, their physical attributes are strictly adapted to cold temperatures in coastal areas -- a stark contrast to the heat and humidity in Dhaka. Animal breeders tend to offer half-baked explanations to justify their inhumane trade. Excuses provided for unethical breeding often involve the prolonged usage of air-conditioning as a "substitute" for cold climates, and selective breeding to reduce prevalence of hereditary disorders, neither of which are

feasible measures.

In July 2021, several local news portals brought to light the alleged wrongdoings of Tapashi Das, the woman behind Puchi Family on YouTube and Facebook. The CEO of Bangladesh Cat Fanciers Society, Sarah Binte Zaman, and Dipanwita Ridi of ALB Animal Shelter, accused Das of mistreating her pet cats for the sake of keeping her followers entertained on social media, while milking her cats' online presence for money.

The allegations against Das are evident in her many posts and videos where she can be seen forcefully pulling her cats' tails, bathing her cats with detergent soap and cold water, and holding her cats inappropriately enough to cause them distress. The only thing more atrocious than Das' actions is the positive audience reception to her problematic videos.

Facebook page Bambi- the mango operates as an online-based animal rescue service, primarily focused on various species of birds. When putting up adoption posts for injured birds, founder Neha Zaman often asks if the adopter in question is willing to care for the rescued birds according to their special needs. This is a question which just about every potential pet adopter should ask themselves, but often don't.

People lean towards overestimating their animal adoption capabilities just so that they can have a pet as a prop for trendy Instagram photos or viral TikTok videos. Is that all an animal's life is worth to you? A handful of likes and shares?

Rasha Jameel is your neighbourhood feminist- apu-who-writes-big-essays. Remind her to also finish writing her bioinformatics research paper at rasha.jameel@outlook.com

The consequences of comparison

TAZREEN JAHAN BARI

A rare good day came to an abrupt halt when I checked social media and saw a bunch of my peers achieving impossible feats while I lounged around in my room binge watching mediocre Netflix shows.

No matter how skilled you are, how perfect your grade sheets are or how attractive you are — there is always going to be someone better than you and seemingly living a better life than you. But how do we measure who is greater? And even if someone is better than you in any given field, why does that put a damper on your happiness?

Social comparison theory, proposed by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954, suggests that human beings in social situations will compare themselves with others for self-evaluation. This comparison can be an upward comparison — when we compare ourselves with someone doing better than us; downward comparison — where we compare ourselves to someone doing worse than us; and lateral comparison — where both subjects are at a similar level.

Comparison can have both positive effects such as motivation and progress, as well as negative effects such as unhealthy competition or feelings of inadequacy. But it's worth pondering whether the possibility of positive changes social comparison can bring in a young individual's life is a risk worth taking when pitted against the myriad negative effects it may cause.

Comparison can serve as a source of motivation as it pushes a person to do better and improve. When this happens collectively, it can result in a group of people pushing each other to do better, resulting in collective progress. On the other end of the spectrum is an obsession with achievement which pushes everyone to perform at a certain level that might not be feasible depending on context. This inability to keep up with a world glorifying overachievers can again create a negative self-image, injecting feelings of inadequacy and guilt.

To the typical Bangladeshi parent, nothing is quite as important as doing well in exams. It will be difficult to find a Bangladeshi student who has not been asked the infamous "Ora kon chaal er bhaat khay?" (What kind of rice do they eat?) that no one knows the answer to. Regardless of what the letters on a report card say, the inevitable question thrown in their direction is, "What did x/y/z get?"

Jarah Mahzabeen Fatima, a final-year English Language and Literature student at Bangladesh University of Professionals, says, "I was never directly compared but the subtle comparisons in questions like how much so or so got every time we got our results followed me around throughout my school life. Now that I am in university and my parents have stopped doing it, I keep comparing myself to my peers on my own accord."

When we are brought up with a mindset where evaluation refers to comparison with peers rather than ourselves, it's only natural that even when our parents stop comparing us, we unconsciously do the same.

It's not surprising that we grow up as young adults who perceive peers as competitors, and not collaborators. The metaphorical "snakes" replacing our classmates as we grow up do not come out of the blue but are manufactured by this ideology of comparison where, to be anything but an utter failure, you must beat everyone around you.

Sheikh Aquib Mahmood, working as a relationship officer at Core Devs Ltd. says, "I remember when I was in Class 2, my mom got really mad at me for coming second because if you're not number one, does your accomplishment even count? So, of course, I grew up to be someone who feels inadequate when someone does better than me."

The upward comparison that is supposed to motivate us to do better often ends up making us feel inadequate and crush whatever self-confidence we had. Perpetually feeling inferior to peers can lead to more negative feelings like envy and even contempt towards those doing better than us.

Additionally, downward comparison which is supposed to make us feel better about our situation by comparing ourselves with someone worse off can lead to guilt. As Aquib mentions, "What's worse than feeling

inferior is the good feeling that comes with seeing someone doing worse than you because, beyond the insecurity and envy, there is the guilt of having such negative thoughts."

Feelings of inadequacy, a tendency to invalidate other people's achievements out of inferiority complex, and unhealthy competition in any given context results from the system of measuring anything and everything by comparison that is instilled in us from an early age. Instead of putting the focus on their child, parents tend to put it on others in hopes of motivating them or creating an ideal standard for them which they expect their children to match.

Lubna Jahan, senior teacher at Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and a mother of two, comments, "I used to indirectly compare my children with others in terms of academic achievements or manners because I thought it would motivate them to do better. Being a middle child and compared to two overachieving siblings all my life, I should have known better. As my children grew up, they helped me understand that comparison is

it generates in the long run far outweighs the positive ones."

Research done in 2006 on the destructive emotions developed through social comparison concludes that frequent social comparison can lead to a dependency on external standards for self-evaluation and "for young people, in particular, those standards are increasingly made salient by media, and promoted by advertisers." Contentment and happiness are thus sacrificed in the pursuit of elusive perfection.

Mormita Jahan Mormi is a first-year undergraduate student of Economics at the University of Dhaka. She does not think any positive change can come from comparison as it inherently creates an inferiority complex. "When I cannot meet the highest standards set by society in any given field, my self-esteem depletes and nothing I achieve feels good enough," she says.

In a never-ending competition, contentment is a myth. And so, despite some positive impact that comparison



demotivating and ultimately hurts their confidence. So as a parent and teacher I advocate against comparing children to their peers in hopes of positive change."

Head of the Department of Psychology at Dhaka College Professor Dr. Syed Azizul Islam states, "Practicing psychologists always advise parents against comparing their children to others as the negative feelings

on an individual level can generate, self-evaluation should not depend on comparison.

Professor Islam suggests "limitation and management of social comparison for better mental health" as we must accept the particular context of every person before considering someone our competitor.

Rather than chasing unattainable standards, it is more practical to focus on acknowledging the progress we made in comparison to our past selves. Not everyone makes developments the same way and not everyone's reality is the same. So, the basis of measuring self-worth should primarily focus on self and not others.

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Tazreen's entire existence can be summed up in burgers, books, bad music taste and binge-watching k-dramas. To complain about her overuse of alliteration, reach her at tazreenzahan@gmail.com

PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA



ECHOES BY
 ASRAR CHOWDHURY

DO I NEED TO BE MORE LIKE THEM?

I
 Childhood is fantasised in most cultures. In the West, Mum and Dad read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* or Hans Christian Anderson. In Bangladesh, Mum and Dad read Dakshinaranjan Mitra's *Thakurmar Jhuli*.

Fairy tales follow a common formula. Most end with the phrase, "...and they lived happily ever after." Reality is, childhood for many is anything but living happily ever after.

From the moment kids go to school, they're compared against other kids who do better. The boy in the seat to your right is wonderful at Maths. He's the teacher's pet. On the day the teacher isn't in a good mood, you're bombarded with, "Why aren't you like him?"

Pink Floyd expressed this wonderfully with "How can you have any pudding if you don't eat your meat?" I'm sure we can all recall one teacher who compared us with their pet and struck terror in our hearts. We can probably laugh it off now. When we had to go through it, though, it was tough.

II
 If you thought teachers were the only ones in school who compared you with their pet, you must have lived in Geoffrey Boycott's "cloud-cuckoo land". There was another boy who sat to your left. He was the one with the latest gadget. No, that friend didn't compare himself with you,



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

but did indirectly show off his gadget.

Wait. There's another one. You went on a school trip. Unfortunately, your Mum and Dad didn't dress you up in designer clothes. Your friends never pointed a finger, but you still compared yourself with others. Comparisons can go either way. Don't

always blame it on others. The problem is, it's not simple.

Comparisons are ubiquitous. Just open Facebook or Instagram. Your friends are posting and showing off. Once again, you're comparing yourself with them. It's Hotel California. "You can check out any-

time you like, but you can never leave."

Even if it's getting on your nerves, you can't block or remove your friends due to social pressure.

III
 Comparing X with Y isn't necessarily a problem. Our parents, elders, teachers and well-wishers want our best. We would definitely love to see our loved ones be as happy as the others. We also compare ourselves with others to improve. The problem is, how many people can handle the pressure of these comparisons?

Pressure, over time, they say, makes diamonds out of coal. What they don't tell you, is that too much pressure can turn coal to powder.

Do promise yourself one thing. When you become a parent, or a teacher who handles young minds, never shatter the dreams of the young by comparing them with somebody else for no good reason. If you've experienced it yourself, then please be empathetic.

If everybody tried to be Einstein, the world would only have one colour. Even black and white has three shades; the third being grey.

Asrar Chowdhury teaches Economics in classrooms. Outside, he watches Test cricket, plays the flute and listens to music and radio podcasts. Email: asrarul@juniv.edu or asrarul@gmail.com

satire.

The Bangladeshi Way to Cracking High School

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

Having been a teacher's pet and gained nothing out of it, I am probably the perfect person to advise others on how to nail high school. I could stretch this article to an entire self-help book and rip gullible teenagers off in the process, but I'm not famous on social media.

HIS MAJESTY'S WAY IS THE ONLY WAY

The golden rule of nailing your math exam is to solve problems "the right way" -- your teacher's way. Sure, you can approach the problem differently and solve it in an easier, more efficient manner but don't expect full marks once you're done.

And, by God, don't even dare approach the teacher for correction and say, "But sir, this other teacher solved it using a different and valid method." My left cheek still stings at the memory of the repercussion of the response to that.

NEVER MISS TUTORIALS

"Keep your school close and your tuitions closer" - Moon Tzu

Attending school regularly might be tough. So, take a raincheck every once in a while. However, make sure never to miss private coaching classes of the same teacher teaching you at school (or whatever it is that he does in school). The teacher takes school as seriously as you do, which basically means he doesn't care.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

If you miss tuitions though, you hurt his ego and most importantly, you jeopardise his tax-free prime source of income. If you do miss a class in case of emergencies, definitely complete your payment first thing next class to cheer him up.

OWN BLUE PENS

A blue pen is the most useful tool for a high school student, a weapon which may even help compensate for the

lack of substantiality in your answer sheet. If you don't know why the mitochondria is the powerhouse of a cell, just write the word "mitochondria" with a blue pen. Leave a few lines blank and write "reason for mitochondria being the powerhouse of the cell" in blue. Write the digits 1, 2 and 3 vertically, again, in blue pen. And then, using a black pen, fill up the blank spaces with whatever you want.

As a cherry on top, draw an aesthetic horizontal line to specify the end of your answer and hope that your teacher is delusional enough to fall for this scam.

BANGLA ESSAY

Points, pages and poems, also known as "The Three Ps", are going to help you get the highest marks in Bangla essays (12 out of 20 that is).

According to them, "Poets are born in exam halls." So, unleash your inner Tagore and forge verses. If you run out of points, just use synonyms of previous headers to create new ones and spread them out evenly so that the teacher doesn't notice by the time he flips over 27 pages.

Lastly, don't let your creativity and passion for something extra-curricular come in the way of your academics. God forbid, you might end up surviving school or worse -- wind up being happy!

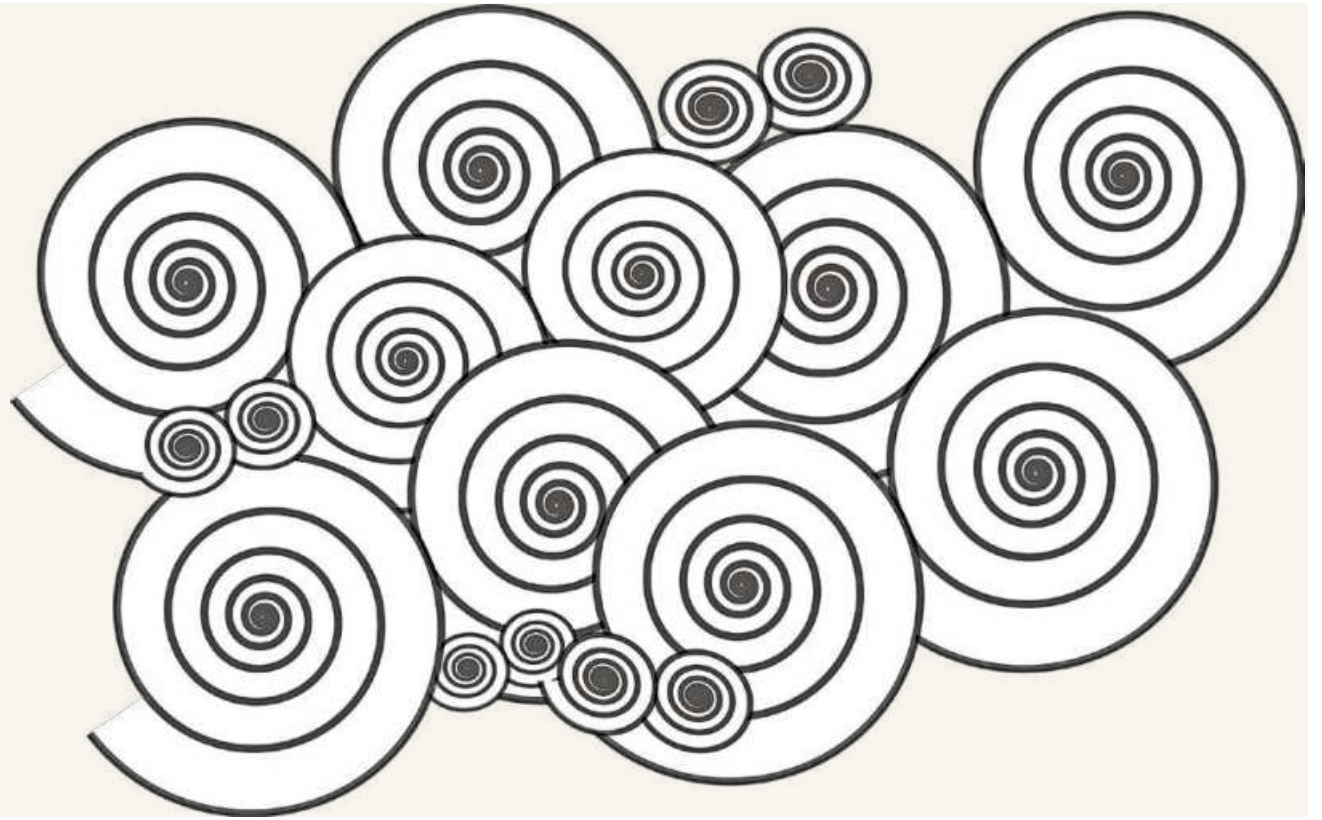
Suggest Ifti nonfiction at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

Wintertide

RIFAT ISLAM

Arrival perpetual yet unforeseen;
Embraced wholeheartedly.
Your cold-blooded drought on my skin.
You stay silent and speak;
We create souvenirs while you stay.

Heaven in the long dark,
Colours missed.
Bittersweet wind through red lips;
I've latched onto you.
I sing to you quietly;
"I love you."



MAGIC

BUSHRA ZAMAN

Abstract paintings are fascinating for many reasons, one of them being the many different opinions various people have about their true meaning.

It was these differing opinions that I carefully, but unnoticeably, listened to as I stood by the juice bar a few feet away from the main exhibit of my painting.

"I bet the ear being spoken into is symbolic of opinions being forcefully fed to people. You know how society is nowadays, full of people wanting to express their own opinions, but a surprisingly limited number of people to actually listen to other's opinions on the same issues," expressed a young girl with seemingly much disdain for the human race.

She glanced at her dewy-eyed companion for a sympathetic reply, only to hear a snarky one instead, "I bet that interpretation has nothing to do with you being told you have poor taste in clothes?"

I smiled, but only briefly, for my gaze was caught by a child and his mother slowly walking up to my painting and staring in confusion.

"Mom, why do people make abstracts that are so hard to understand?"

The mother replied, equally perplexed, "Maybe because it is fun to see others try to guess what is going on in the painting?" I gasped at the accuracy. My eyes darted to the child for an entertaining response, and I was not disappointed, for he said, "I think artists make abstracts when they want to express something but get tired of adding in details, like I do with my book reports."

I would have said that I giggled, but I practically snorted and nearly choked on the pineapple juice I'd been trying, owing to how far off yet how close the child's interpretation was to the truth. I could not help but wonder how unrelated the name of my painting, "magic" seemed compared to its content. Maybe I did get tired of trying to perfect the details of a magical person on canvas, and hence ended up with an abstract instead of a portrait.

To be fair though, who wouldn't be tired from trying to paint magic? If magic itself is the subject of a painting, nothing seems to do it justice. You try your very best to portray this gem of a human being and the admirable, genuine joy they spread, trying to figure out what colour would match their radiant goodness best.

I have heard for the longest time that the best art stems out of having felt pain. But the paintings that result from trying to show the world the adoration and admiration you feel towards those you love can be just as priceless. Even if solely due to the effort you put in.

And so, with such excuses, I tried to reason with myself for trying to paint my uncle, someone who spreads joy everywhere he goes and has a kind ear to lend to even those unaware of needing to be listened to. This continued for as long as I waited for his arrival, which was shortly after the exhibit filled completely with people.

The arrival was easy to notice, despite the huge crowd. I just had to look for the person beaming from a mile away, having understood what I painted at first glance.

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Contact her at bushrazaman31@yahoo.com

How TikTok Is Shaping Modern Music

SHAYOR HAMID

When Drake released “Toosie Slide” last year, it was not the first nor the last song containing step-by-step details of a dance move. It was, however, one of the first songs of its kind by a huge artist in the era of TikTok.

The song did what it was designed to do – become the fastest song to reach 1 billion views on the platform in 2020, according to TikTok’s first music report.

We can never know what goes on behind the creative process of songs, but certain aspects of the songs make it obvious. Musicians coming up with new ways to use social media for their music is nothing new. However, TikTok is the first giant platform to have music pre-integrated in its DNA.

The advent of streaming services caused a massive change in the music industry, making songs shorter to hold the listener’s attention, while ensuring payment for full streams of songs. Similarly, the effect of TikTok goes further beyond promotion and communication for the music industry seeping into the creative process as well.

According to TikTok, 80 percent of the platform’s users say they discover new music through the app, leaving no doubt that TikTok is leading one of the biggest

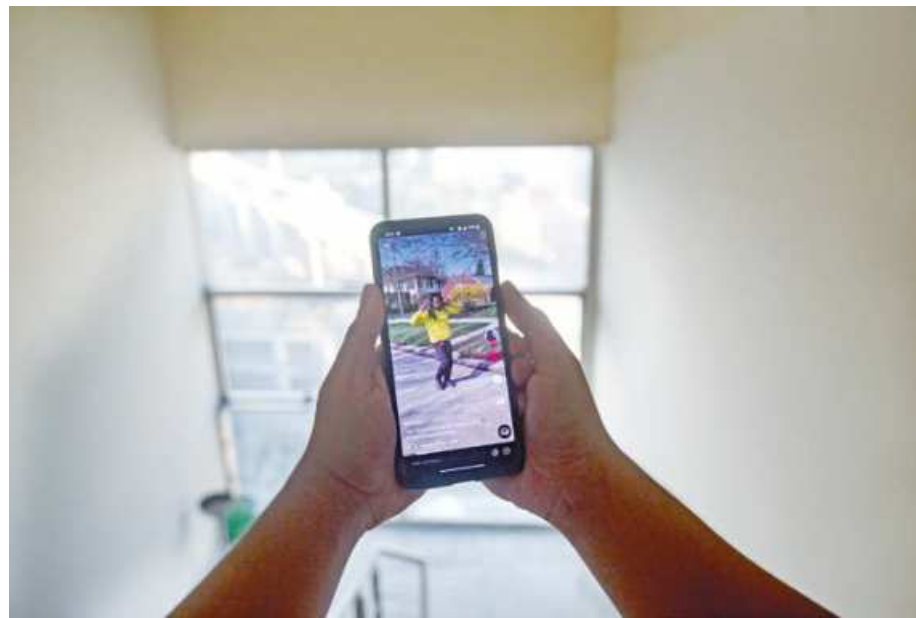


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

shifts in the music industry, revolutionising every aspect from the creative process to the marketing.

There is a vast variety of music that rules TikTok but the common elements are short musical sections or lyrics that are evocative, engaging, and easy to perform. The

production aspect usually contains catchy and simplistic chord progressions. A short bass or rhythm section that is easy to follow along and dance to is a common staple. Some experts have named the phenomenon the “TikTok effect”.

Trevor Daniel, the musician behind the

famous TikTok song “Falling”, explained how musicians are now looking for sounds that are catchy for social media, to make it blow up.

Repetition breeds familiarity, which the platform uses to engage with the audience promoting TikTok content that features certain songs gaining traction at that moment. TikTok has a page itself where it suggests the trending songs of the week and promotes the video if a creator uses one of those songs. Landing on the trending page can mean millions of views for that song. A lot of these songs are released accompanying a TikTok challenge, such was the case for viral songs like Doja Cat’s “Say So”.

Record labels are actively reaching out to TikTok influencers to use their artists’ songs on TikTok, guaranteeing millions of streams. This development pushes the scale back into the label’s hands which they can use to influence the artists as independent musicians are unable to afford expensive marketing schemes. But smaller artists are also teaming up with smaller TikTok creators and coming up with creative ideas to merge the two worlds.

TikTok is here to stay, and we are yet to see the long-lasting effects of the platform on the music industry.

Why are Agents Essential to Football?

SYED MD. RAKEEN

As much as the media portrays agents as devils behind transfer negotiations, players can’t afford to be without them. Since highly coveted players face contract uncertainties at their clubs while sparking a bidding war among other clubs, it should be understandable why footballers seek agency services to deal with off-field matters.

Football agents act as legal representatives for players as well as coaches, with their primary responsibility involving negotiating employment and endorsement contracts for their clients. They’re expected to maintain a fiduciary relationship with clients, navigating the options and coming up with the best possible alternatives.

As the years went by, agents’ duties have expanded towards being a therapist and at times, a pseudo-parent. Their guidance ensures that players are on the right track as numerous youngsters are thrust into a world with a lot of money whilst having minimal life experiences.

Although agents are aplenty in football, the best players are often represented by super agents, two of them being Mino Raiola and Jorge Mendes.

Raiola, whose clients involve stars like Erling Haaland, Paul Pogba, and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, is infamous for stirring up controversies and pocketing massive sums while brokering transfer deals. Despite his bad reputation, however, his clients seem to trust him massively. That is because players will always look to secure themselves financially in the future by earning as much as possible during their playing careers. Hiring an agent with sound expertise on the market rate of fee structures and salaries, and a proven track record of success ensures that finances will be the least of the players’ worries.

Unlike Raiola, Jorge Mendes didn’t garner a bad reputation in the media, largely due to his less outspoken nature. The Portuguese, who represents Cristiano Ronaldo, has negotiated contracts worth over a billion dollars in total, making him the wealthiest football agent in the world.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Football contracts are very tricky to work out. Expecting a young footballer to interpret contractual law along with its consequences seems irrational. An agent’s involvement can necessitate that players won’t be exploited during contract negotiations while ensuring that a player’s focus remains solely on football. Although some agents are notorious for linking players with clubs in a bid to land a higher pay package for clients, it’s not that commonplace in the top leagues.

With a rise in salaries and transfer fees in football, an agent’s influence will only grow. Agents act under the guidelines of FIFA and its corresponding authorities. Relieving

them of their duties would certainly lead to many murky and shady dealings.

As the majority of players arrive from humble beginnings, a lack of counsel would leave them horribly exposed to legal and financial affairs. Whilst it’s true that agents partake in unethical activities at times, their involvement is necessary for maintaining a plain-sailing operation in complex football deals.

Syed Md. Rakeen believes that Manchester United will get silverware this season. Prove him wrong at [facebook.com/rafsan.isnayeem](https://www.facebook.com/rafsan.isnayeem)