

# EDITORIAL

I never intend to pull an all-nighter. It's just that some nights, the hours fly but things don't come together.

Work. Sometimes it's just lots and lots of work. Sometimes I'm too exhausted to move, so I'll sit on the floor and think in circles about all that needs to be done.

Once you notice the room softly glowing because of the light entering from behind the curtains, you know you're done. There's no hitting your pillow tonight.

But it's not all bad. You don't have to undergo the painstaking exercise of dragging yourself out of your bed to the tune of whatever unfortunate noise you have set as your alarm.

That tune is absolutely a trigger for me now. One of you should come up with a random alarm tune generator so the rest of us aren't prepared for what noise is about to wake us up the next morning. Constant vigilance.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



## PLAYWATCH

### MUSIC



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

# Reimagining South Asian Ghazals with Arooj Aftab

## RAYA MEHNAZ

Pakistani musician Arooj Aftab is no stranger to the decadence of cultural heritage in musical imagination. After all, she has used Urdu ghazals and idioms frequently in her music in the past. Her newest installation, *Vulture Prince*, is no exception. The album was released on April 23, 2021, an otherwise idle Friday, unleashing endless grief, sorrow and acceptance packed within seven songs.

Aftab, while having worked with Pakistani ghazals on her first album, *Bird Under Water*, have used the ghazals in this album to channel her grief regarding the death of her younger brother—to whom the album is dedicated. Using poetry from Mirza Ghalib, Jalaluddin Rumi and ghazals from Hafeez Hoshiarpuri, Aftab tries to articulate her loss through a genre-defying experience.

Ghazals are and have been a South Asian musical delicacy that has often been inspired by, and consequently meant to, bridge the gap between the Creator and man. Considering the fact that it is perhaps the oldest form of music that speaks of otherworldly loss, it seemed fitting for Aftab to create an odd unification of centuries old words with contemporary losses.

It is especially fitting considering that ghazals were often meant to convey the worldly obstacles as well as otherworldly devotions. The poets used their ghazals to reflect social, political and religious drawbacks as a message to God. It would not be too forward to say that *Vulture Prince* inhabits all the modern sorrows of man within its century-old words.

After all, Aftab's album was being

written and produced at a time when the world was in disarray because of a pandemic and Aftab's own world was destroyed by personal loss. The pain is portrayed rather spectacularly; her single "Mohabbat" went on to receive many accolades and a place in Obama's personal playlist.

"Mohabbat", originally a Hafeez Hoshiarpuri ghazal, is a 7-minute-long track that only relies on minimal guitar string to guide Aftab's grief-stricken voice. The song begins leisurely with the words, "Mohabbat karne wale kam na honge," which loosely translates to, "Those who love you won't be few in number." The lyrics of this stunning track might fool the listeners into believing it is a love song, however Aftab's voice will set them on the right path. It can be a song about love, however, it intersects love and loss. It is about healing. It is everything consuming about love and it is everything outside of love, all rolled into one song. Aftab does more than cover ghazals, she inhabits them, moulding their souls into her own imagination, her own story.

Arooj Aftab's music has long since stopped meaning anything ordinary and expected. She was always outside the mold, creating and recreating with her Pakistani-Sufi roots and her western instrumentalisation. With *Vulture Prince*, she has managed to create an experimental intimacy within something that was until a few years only a South Asian heritage.

*Raya Mehnaz likes to critically analyse anything regarding pop culture, and when she's not doing that, she likes to live life dangerously — one House MD episode at a time. Send help at fb.com/raya.mehmaz*



shoutds Tag us or use #shoutds to get featured.

Email us at [shoutds@gmail.com](mailto:shoutds@gmail.com) with feedback, comments, and reader submissions.