

FROM BONDHUREY TO BILLBOARDS

Muza brings Bangla beats to dance floor

ANTARA RAISA

Bangladeshi-American musician Muza, has carved a niche for himself in the music industry, seamlessly intertwining traditional folk with contemporary beats. From the upbeat rhythm of *Bondhurey* to the soulful cadence of *Noya Daman*, Muza's musical journey is a testament to his artistic prowess.

Recently, he was featured on the iconic Times Square billboard in New York, the face of Spotify's *Desi Hits* category, as the first Bangladeshi musician.

In an exclusive interview, The Daily Star delved into the depths of his musical journey, the inspiration behind his compositions, and his aspirations for the future.

How did it feel to witness yourself on such a grand platform?

I'd always pass by this iconic billboard growing up, but never imagined that one day I'd be on it, especially as a Bangladeshi artiste. So, I feel great that I have been featured here. My parents also came to see the billboard, which was a surreal feeling.

Initially, your parents were not very supportive of your musical career. How has the journey been?

The journey has been rewarding. In the beginning, their concerns were understandable, as they wanted the best for me. Over time, witnessing my dedication to Bangla music and my commitment to preserving our roots, has transformed their doubts into genuine pride. They've seen my dedication and the impact I've made, which has solidified their trust in my abilities.

Your music seamlessly blends folk and modern elements. Could you shed light on the inspiration behind these unique compositions?

The folk genre possesses an unmatched ability to touch the soul of every Bangladeshi. My roots trace back to a small village in Sylhet, where my grandfather's love for folk songs left an indelible mark on me. It's my identity, my heritage.

That's why I wanted to remake these timeless folk tunes, enabling people of all ages to connect with our music and dance to its beats.

Behind every artiste stands a support system. Can you tell us about the individuals who've shaped your musical journey?

Habib Wahid is my inspiration on this musical journey. His melodies have been the backing score of my life since childhood, and it was his iconic song *Din Gelo* that made me fall in love with Bangla music.

Can you share a song lyric or a melody that's been recently stuck in your head?

Lately, I've been engrossed in a project with Fuad Almuqtadir. The chorus of that song has been playing in a loop in my head.

Additionally, a country song, *Late Night* by Morgan Wallen, has piqued my interest. Now, I'm contemplating how to blend Western country music with our traditional folk.

If you could time travel to any musical era, where would you go and why?

The early 2000's and the 80's hold a special allure for me. The early 2000's because I grew up listening to those songs. And the 80's? Well, those songs are timeless masterpieces that always set the stage for a groove.

What's your next venture?

I'm thrilled about an upcoming collaboration with Mumzy. I've often noticed that Hindi tracks steal the limelight at Bangladeshi weddings. Inspired by this, I'm working on upbeat Bangla songs that will find their way into those joyous celebrations. After remaking songs like *Noya Daman* and *Lilabali*, I'm now making a romantic song exclusively for the bride and groom. The recording is already done.

Where do you envision yourself in the next 10 years?

While I'm already in a good place in my career, my competitive spirit drives me to strive for more. I aspire to be an artiste whose songs transcend boundaries, making people groove to Bangla beats across the globe. I want Bangla music to stand on an international platform, offering the world a glimpse into our rich culture and heritage.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Coke Studio Bangla's hit trio to perform in Kolkata

Coke Studio Bangla's hit musical trio- Emon Chowdhury, Arfan Mredha Shibli and Aleya Begum who mesmerised audiences with *Kotha Koio Na* are all set to entertain audiences in Kolkata on August 26.

The noted musicians will play at the Anim8or annual award ceremony, which will start at 5 pm at Rabindra Bhavan Hall No 1.

Starting from *Shada Shada Kala Kala* to *Teka Pakhi* and *Kotha Koio Na*- the Bangladeshi singers will serenade Kolkata audiences with some incredible tracks.

Farooki's 'Monogamy' to feature Chanchal and Xefer



Mostofa Sarwar Farooki's *Ministry of Love* will feature 12 projects which will be helmed by 12 noted directors. Farooki himself will be directing two projects- *Something Like an Autobiography* and *Last Defenders of Monogamy*.

The latter will feature a unique pair- Chanchal Chowdhury and Xefer Rahman. Samina Husain Prema will also be part of the film, which started shooting on August 15.

Chanchal Chowdhury donned a middle-aged look with grey hair and moustache while Xefer looked unrecognisable in a cotton sari. The singer looked sophisticated in glasses and her unique look is sure to catch everyone's attention.

NEWS

S\$7m watch among items seized in S'pore

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their suspected involvement in offences including forgery, money laundering and resisting arrest. All 10 are originally from Fujian, China.

Another 12 are assisting in investigations, while eight others are on the run and have been placed on a wanted list.

The police said more than 250 luxury bags and watches were seized in the raids.

Photos of the seized designer goods showed rows of extravagant watches, with most priced over S\$250,000, said William Tan, manager of luxury watch dealer Watch Exchange.

Tan said one watch in the collection appears to be a Sky Moon Tourbillon by Swiss luxury watch manufacturer Patek Philippe, and is expected to fetch a price of over S\$7 million on the resale market.

The South China Morning Post reported this rare model sold for a record US\$5.8 million (S\$7.8 million) earlier this year, a sale that marked one of the highest prices paid for a

timepiece at an auction.

Luxury watch and bag dealers said interested buyers cannot just walk into shops and buy these highly sought-after items, even if they had the cash.

There is usually a long waiting list for popular models and, if a coveted piece is available, priority would go to VIP buyers. These buyers must have a long purchase history with the brand, said people in the industry.

Another watch seen in the collection is believed to be a Richard Mille RM 07-02 with a sapphire case, which can fetch a price of around S\$2 million on the resale market.

Tan said this piece, which is tough for keen buyers to get their hands on at the boutique, was seen on the wrist of American rapper Nicki Minaj in 2021.

He added that what appears to be a Rolex Daytona Rainbow watch, which costs more than S\$600,000 on the resale market, can also be seen in the photos. This is more than triple the retail price of the watch.

Tan said one collection of 32 watches shown in one of the photos is

estimated to set a buyer back by S\$30 million. Other brands of watches seen in the collection include Chopard, Van Cleef & Arpels and Cartier.

The collection of bags seized is estimated to also cost millions of dollars, those in the business of reselling designer handbags told The Straits Times.

Hermes, Chanel, Dior, Louis Vuitton and Prada bags can be seen in the photos, with some bags estimated to be worth over S\$100,000.

One bag appears to be a specially made Hermes Birkin with matte alligator skin and brushed gold hardware, said the owner of a luxury bag resale business here.

She estimates the pastel green bag to cost around S\$130,000. What looks like an Hermes Himalayan Birkin, a much sought-after item by many collectors, can also be seen on the shelves of the suspects.

Industry experts estimate the bag to cost around S\$250,000, or even double that amount if the hardware is encrusted with diamonds.

Ponzi trading app 'MTFE' shuts down

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acquainted with the app through a friend.

"It offered a \$39 profit each week for investing \$501. At the beginning of August, it suddenly stopped paying money. At that time, they told us that the app is under maintenance. But since Thursday, my balance in the app has turned to minus."

Like him, there are thousands of people in Comilla, Noakhali and Rajshahi who lost hundreds of crores, he said.

"I blame my lust for making 'short-cut' profit," he added.

Rahman, who refused to disclose his first name, said he was informed that he was investing in cryptocurrency.

"They claimed that they were utilising their intellect in crypto trading, while we were contributing with money. So, they retained 55 percent of the profit, allotting us 45 percent. These points were fabricated to lend credibility to their scheme and deceive us into falling for the scam," he added.

In recent years, such platforms, created with unscrupulous

individuals and criminal networks, are capitalising on the anonymity and ease of online transactions to conduct illicit cross-border transfers, evading regulatory oversight and detection.

On August 9, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) in a statement said it noticed that illegal transactions facilitating cross-border payments and online gambling, betting and crypto trading have increased rapidly in recent years.

It decided to work with law enforcement agencies to tackle the menace.

BFIU representatives met with the Criminal Investigation Department of Bangladesh Police, the Cyber Crime Department of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and the private sector in this regard that day.

BFIU chief Md Masud Biswas asked the representatives in the meeting to work together to combat illegal activities and take punitive measures against those involved.

The BFIU is interested in sharing

intelligence with others to eliminate hundi, online gambling, betting, forex and crypto trading, he said.

According to several BFIU officials, money laundering has increased on the back of hundi and online gambling and this has appeared as a major concern.

However, questions are being raised about the effectiveness of government agencies' actions to combat these illegal Ponzi schemes and scams.

The exact amount of money that has been siphoned from Bangladesh through this latest scam remains uncertain, said AKM Fahim Mashroor, chairman of the BASIS standing committee on fintech and digital payment.

"However, there is a discernible rise in scams involving cryptocurrencies, MLMs and online ventures in recent years. Despite the need for vigilance, both law enforcement and BFIU failed to effectively oversee these illicit operations, resulting in capital flight. This has contributed to the ongoing forex crisis," he added.

It won't be much different from DSA

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Asia chapter of Article 19, stated that anytime they tried to talk about the criminalisation of defamation as allowed by the DSA, the government pointed to the constitution to validate it, saying the constitution cannot be changed.

"However, the constitution itself has seen amendments in the past."

Nurul Kabir, editor of the daily New Age, said the government is providing fabricated statements of "meeting international standards" of digital security through the DSA.

"The new law [CSA] is only here to alleviate the bad reputation of the DSA, while continuing to deceive ordinary citizens."

Asif Bin Ali, lecturer and researcher

at North South University, stated that every country needs a formal structure and framework of a digital security law to protect citizens from cyber scams and harassment. "But the problem arose when lawmakers started considering criticisms against the government as a crime."

Rozyna Begum, researcher and human rights activist, said that section 5 of both the DSA and CSA allows the government to censor anything unethical.

"Only the judiciary has the kind of power to sensor anything."

Zillur Rahman, executive director of CGS, concluded the session by stating that "democracy should come first".

"The developed world has such digital security acts but Bangladesh

still needs to follow their international standards."

He added, "Other countries' acts protect their citizens, whereas in Bangladesh, citizens are neglected and oppressed with the DSA. The new Cyber Security Act is here just as an eyewash. It is only possible to establish good governance once the judicial system works independently and law enforcement agencies rid themselves of political influence."

Speakers called the drafting of the CSA a repeat of history, as the DSA had come into effect when criticisms arose about section 57 of the ICT Act.

The DSA continued to be equally repressive and now, the CSA does not promise anything different, they opined.

but far beyond," said Verma.

The high commissioner also said, "Let us stand together against extremism, intolerance, and violence, and work towards a world where the ideals of justice, equality, and human dignity prevail."

"May the memory of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman continue to guide us as we march forward on the path of progress and prosperity."

Delhi stands with Dhaka

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Friendship Society as a special guest in a discussion on the occasion of the 48th martyrdom anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq was the chief guest at the event.

The National Mourning Day holds a significant place in the history and hearts of the Bangladeshi people,

said the envoy, adding that it is a day of reflection, remembrance, and recommitment to the values and ideals that Bangabandhu espoused – democracy, human rights, and social justice.

"His indomitable spirit, visionary leadership, and unwavering dedication to the welfare of his people continue to inspire generations not just within the borders of Bangladesh,

Malibagh intersections, demanding that BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia be allowed to travel abroad for treatment.

The programme caused long tailbacks in the areas.

"If something happens to her [Khaleda], the government will have to take the responsibility," Fakhrul said addressing a brief rally before the

India shouldn't go against will of people here

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Bangladesh's 52-year history."

The AL government is the primary cause of the crisis in Bangladesh, he added.

Later in the day, thousands of BNP supporters marched from the party's Nayapaltan office to Moghbazar via Kakrail, Shantinagar, Mouchak, and

Delhi did it for its own sake

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"I want to ask those who call it [India's reported message] interference: What happened in 1971? India came forward to help us," he said.

"Their soldiers shed blood, [they] sheltered, armed and trained our people. Is that not interfering in internal affairs?" questioned

Quader.

His remarks come after recent reports by Germany-based Deutsche Welle (DW) and India's Anandabazar newspaper that a message has been conveyed to Washington that "New Delhi is not happy with the current role of the United States regarding

the upcoming national polls in Bangladesh".

Earlier in the day, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said if the news on India's diplomatic message to the US on Bangladesh was true, it was unfortunate. This would not be good for regional security, he said.