



EDUCATION

FROM PASSION TO PROFESSION:

What it takes to be a music major

PHOTO: ANTAR CHAKMA

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We live in a world where even the mere consideration of pursuing the performing arts comes as a difficulty to many. However, the difficulty itself doesn't stop our favourite artists from doing what they love. As a teenager who has a passion for music, I have often stumbled upon questions entailing the journey of pursuing music as an academic endeavour and the roads it can lead to.

To break these questions down, I asked for some help from Armeen Musa, a graduate of Berklee College of Music, the first Bangladeshi composer to be part of a Grammy-nominated album, and the founder of The Ghaashphoring Choir.

"There were many reasons for people to try to persuade me against following the study of music, but my passion for the arts helped me overcome all kinds of internal and societal pressures. I'd like to think that I've spent my lifetime pursuing a feeling of spiritual nirvana whenever I do anything creative, and that is something I get from doing music," says Armeen.

"Whenever I met people who, like me, left other career paths to pursue music, I felt like I was at home. The ambience of a music college anywhere in the world reflects pure love. It is a place where everyone comes to study something they've set their heart on despite its risky prospects. And there is something beautiful to be found in that connection," adds Armeen.

Pursuing music can be a difficult choice given the prevalence of familial and societal expectations. Therefore, mastering different skill sets is almost always an instrumental part of a musician's life.

"In my college, there are 12 majors in music itself. They range from Music Business and Musical Education

to things like Sound and Light Design. Many of my peers who studied Composition now work for places such as Disneyland. Their studies gave way to a career where they could have a steady life as a musician," adds Armeen.

Armeen also mentioned that success in the performing arts is a lifelong commitment. "While hard work, luck, and connections favour some musicians, for others, the risk doesn't pay off. Therefore, all musicians need to acquire skills to find work for themselves. Performing is a job where you will often find yourself in a gamble, whereas being an audio engineer or an entertainment lawyer is something more financially viable and secure," she said.

The path to pursuing music is full of challenges. As music schools abroad are expensive, you must properly estimate the full costs of your education before committing to a degree. It is also important to consider the emotional aspect of pursuing music as it involves the risk of feeling exhausted when faced with difficulties pursuing something you are passionate about. Other hurdles also exist such as a lack of time to practise while finishing coursework, and difficulties balancing your social life.

To learn more about it, I talked to Imran Ahmed, a graduate of Swarnabhoomi Academy of Music and a jazz guitar player at Coke Studio Bangla.

"Managing your finances is one of the bigger challenges of pursuing a music degree abroad, as it is very expensive. But on the flip side, it provides you with strong connections as well as perspectives that serve you for a lifetime. I have found it helpful to take part in internship opportunities to balance both cases. As an ensemble player, I learned a lot about being a band

leader and arranging for multiple styles," says Imran.

While the challenges of pursuing music may vary from institution to institution, some challenges remain pertinent. "Studying any art form is tough. Music is not only philosophical but also incredibly mathematical. As music is not a subject in which you can get good grades simply by studying hard, you must be able to enjoy it and have enough time to practise so that you can succeed. Your music department will help you understand the struggles of a musician and help you navigate through them," says Karishma Sanu Sovvota, an Indian classical music major at Dhaka University.

Applying to a music college abroad is not entirely different from applying to regular colleges. The only exception involves passing an audition that caters to the major of your choice. Among universities in Bangladesh, the Dhaka University Faculty of Arts, Law & Social Sciences offers comprehensive music courses. To get in, all students must sit for the B unit exam as well as go through a viva exam in which their rhythm and melody sense is tested. The University of Rajshahi, the University of Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar University also offer courses in music.

"Even as a performer, I have developed my skills in management, teaching, and organising in such a way that they all come together and contribute to various parts of my career. I only recommend studying music if you are willing to surrender to your teachers, your books, and the music that you are taught with no expectations other than that of learning. What happens next is a bit of luck, hard work, and personality," adds Armeen.

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