

#TRENDS

How a guitar school from Bandarban touched hearts

Recently, a Facebook video of children from Bandarban playing guitars and singing songs went viral on Facebook. I personally discovered them performing the "Bus Shohokari" song by the musical band Bagdhara. The children of Bandarban strumming the guitar strings in harmony captivated me instantly.

Bawm Ram Tiam Amlai, the founder of Basic Guitar Learning School, mentions, "One cannot progress much in guitar without basics, so my aim was to teach basics of guitar to the children." That is how the name came into place.

Amlai adds, "I have seen kids playing digital games from a very early age. Instead of getting into bad habits like online gambling, drugs, video games, I want them to be involved in playing guitar." Hence started the journey of Basic Guitar Learning School.

The beginnings were small: 4 or 5 students came to a small room in the 2nd floor of a house in New Gulshan, Bandarban. Now, almost 50 students are playing guitar at Marma Artists Group Training Room in Bandarban town.

What started as a journey in 2018 has now won the hearts of millions online and reached many popular bands. The first song cover that gained widespread popularity over the internet was "Asha" by the rock band Warfaze. "Later, during our performance day at Manik Mia Avenue, we met the band members in person and sang the same song in front of them in the green room," mentions Amlai.

In these 8 years, Amlai did not stop his lessons even when the pandemic struck. Over WhatsApp calls with his students, he kept delivering guitar lessons.

Amlai mentions, "There are students who are even 10 years old learning guitar. Some of the students come from five to ten kilometres away."

He did not think his videos would gain so much popularity; he just started posting to keep memories. In this regard, Amlai adds, "I wanted to keep these videos saved in my page so that the children can come and look back at these when they get older."

Till now, Basic Guitar Learning School has performed in four programs in Dhaka and



had two performances in Bandarban. Last year, on occasion of Chaitra Sankranti, 12 of his students performed the song "Heal the World" along with the band Warfaze in tribute to Michael Jackson at BICC. This year, they were invited to sing the National



Anthem in a program at the National Parliament Complex.

He recalls one special moment from the performance at National Parliament Complex, "The school students who came as audience were taking autographs and clicking pictures with the children of Basic Guitar Learning School. We did not know any of them, even they did not know me, but they knew the children who performed in those Facebook videos."

Basic Guitar Learning School also performed at the opening ceremony of Poh Chu Gro that took place this September in Bandarban, organized by Green Milieu and British Council Bangladesh.

The children can currently perform songs in five different languages: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, English, and Bengali. He believes that while preserving our own culture, we should also respect different cultures. Amlai mentions, "By performing songs from different languages and different cultures, we can make people from that culture feel happy and respected."

He was inspired to playing guitar when he saw his seniors performing at school functions. And now, Amlai's students are inspired by him. Some of his students even post videos of them playing guitar on their social media.

Amlai extends his gratitude to Chathui Pru Sir, who had encouraged him to play the guitar. He highlights in this regard, "If it was not for Chathui Pru Sir, I would not have been where I am today."

With encouragement from him, Amlai joined the Chimbuk band, one of the earliest bands in Bandarban. Amlai dreams that in the future, some of his students would also be a part of that band.

Speaking of his aims, Amlai notes, "I would be more than happy if even one or two students can come up as a rising star." Every year, as an end of year ritual, Amlai records his students' yearly accomplishments and performances. He dreams to build a studio one day where students can play guitar, perform other artistic activities, and engage in meaningful conversations.

By Labiba Tasnim
Photo: Courtesy