

A teacher and a singer

Nadia Saleh

Sahana Bajpaie's debut album 'Notun Kore Pabo Bole' - a collection of Rabindra sangeet, which came out on March 6, 2007 has created a stir in the music scenario of Bangladesh. On the occasion of her first ever released album, she agreed to sit for a lively session of interview. On the appointed day, she was at her office in BRAC University, dressed in her usual outfit that made her look both proper and trendy at the same time. Throughout the conversation she was very relaxed and candid.



Sahana Bajpaie
Chowdhury

In revealing her bitter-sweet memories, she clarified that her real life partner Shayan Chowdhury Ornob one of the top listed Bengali singers of the present time; proposed to marry her a long time ago during their childhood when they were classmates in Santiniketan. She was only seven years old and in class-3 when he had proposed to her which scared her so much that she went up to the Principal and complained. Eventually they were bound together by the holy bond of marriage in 2000 after knowing each other for long 20 years.

Sahana, born on February 6, 1978 entered the world of music holding her father's hands at a very tender age. He taught her singing. She learnt her very first song from him at the age of three "Shokatore oi kadiche shokole" a Rabindra sangeet. Her main inspiration was her father. Her debut album is a tribute to him. Both her parents were professors in North Bengal University.

She was educated in Santiniketan. She spent 20 long years there from 1982 to 2002. According to her, "Growing up in Santiniketan is an enlightening experience". She reminisced having classes under the trees where studies were not imposed and music was a part of life. Being brought up in an open environment helped the students become broad minded. They were exposed to Rabindra sangeet and Baul music and the motivation came from the place itself said a smiling Shahana.

Her album titled 'Notun Kore Pabo Bole' is one of Tagore's songs but not included in the album. In describing the reason behind choosing this name for her album, she said that she wanted to rediscover the songs receive Tagore through a new light. As a true admirer of Rabindra sangeet, she believes that the main theme or words of the song can never be changed but fusing it with a Western sense of music is possible. In support of her claim, she used some foreign instruments like keyboard programming, base guitar, organ, electric guitar etc. in this album. The album occurred 'refreshing' to some and others raised criticisms of it being a bit traditional.

Favorite person: Father Bimal Bajpaie

Favorite foods: Succi, Bengali food

Favorite poems: Wasteland and The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Favorite novels: Unbearable lightness of being-Milan Kundera, 100 years of solitude-Gabriel Garcia Marques, Shesher Kobita-Rabindranath Tagore

Favorite arts: Pablo Picasso's "Guernika" and Tagore's paintings

Favorite places: Forests, The Himalayas, London

Favorite time of year: Spring

Songs she sings to herself: "Shokatore oi kadiche shokole" and "I'll be your mirror"
-Velvet Underground

Lecturer of English literature in BRAC University Sahana admitted that teaching is her true calling. She always wanted to be a teacher following the footsteps of her parents. She joined BRAC University in September 2005. She feels that teaching is an immensely rewarding job. It is the most important area where one can make a change not only by teaching but also by showing a way to the students. Shahana sings habitually. In her opinion, she puts the same amount of energy in teaching as well as recording. Music is a form of a passion for her. She plays the harmonica (mouth organ), Tanpura and practices everyday. "Music is a kind of a religion to me. It is the only time I feel spiritual" she says. She wished she could play the harmonium but the teachers at Santiniketan discouraged them, as there is a risk for singers to be dependent on it and thus put less effort. Konica Bannerjee who was one of the greatest singers of Rabindra sangeet also could not play the harmonium.

Asked if she feels in any way competitive towards her husband Ornob, she replied that there is no rivalry between them. She says that, "he is way up there" and she is very proud of him. She described him as being her best friend. She also added how they together initially had created the band 'Bangla' during her 1st year of B. A. and performed in Kolkata and Delhi. But later she broke away from the group. She also taught music to children in Kolkata for a year.

According to her, in terms of popularity, music in Bangladesh is far ahead of India. She appreciates singers like Habib and thinks that he has initiated a revolution in the music industry. Shahana also likes the popularity, acceptance and admiration of singer James in 'Bollywood' that she sees as a plus point for Bangladesh. Lecturer and singer Sahana is quite and interesting person who supports the Bangladeshi cricket team and enjoys the cartoon - Popeye. She spends her leisure in reading, listening to music, cooking and by thinking about her home. Traveling is the love of her life. She loves dogs as well. When asked to describe herself in one word, she came up with the answer "obsessive" which is quite mysterious and unusual.

Sahana is hopeful about releasing her next album around March next year, which is going to be another collection of Rabindra sangeet. About 50% of the work is done but the title is not fixed yet. Once again, it is going to be her solo album with perhaps Ornob joining her in one or two songs. She is willing to make the next one a bit more adventurous in order to make it widely acceptable. Her future plan is to continue working with Rabindra sangeet. She wants to learn and sing the unpopular and unsung songs of Tagore. Her intention is to try to make people understand the exclusiveness of Tagore's songs. She wants to break the stereotypical notion of Rabindra sangeet being only for the old people or merely a lullaby. She feels that Tagore's songs are so full of meaning that analyzing them in depth reveals something new everyday. According to her, she is still learning music, literature and life itself. Her message to her fans is, "Keep listening to all kinds of music. It is the only healing power that is left in this world."

Student of BRAC University